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VIRTUE AND CHRISTIAN REFINEMENT

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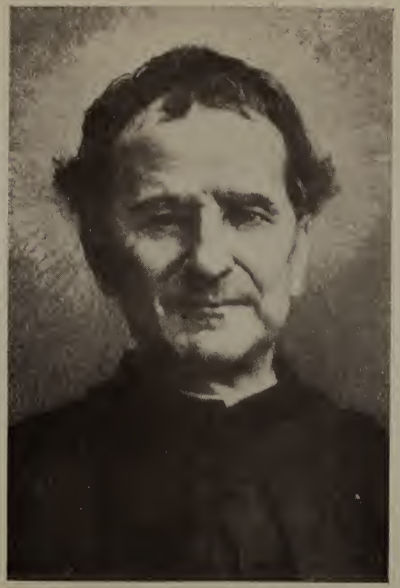
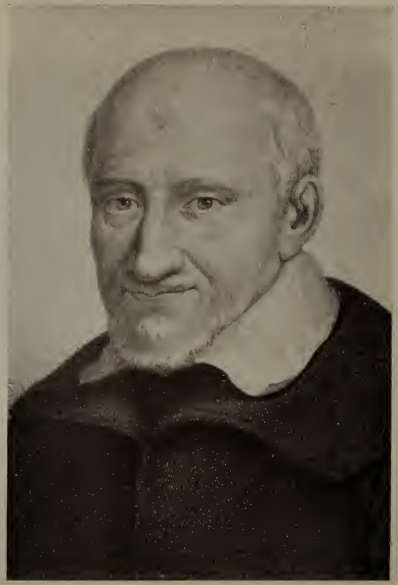


BLESSED DON BOSCO
1815-1888



ST VINCENT DE PAUL
1576-1660

VIRTUE AND CHRISTIAN REFINEMENT

According to the Spirit of St Vincent de Paul

OR

A MONTH'S DEVOTION TO ST VINCENT

BY

BLESSED DON BOSCO

Translated by a Sister of Charity

INTRODUCTIONS BY

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE

AND

VERY REV. FATHER SOUVAY, C.M.

Superior General of the Priests of the Mission, and of the Sisters of Charity

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PREFACE

THE intention of this book is to offer to the faithful a model of the Christian Life in the acts, virtues and words of St Vincent de Paul. The title is "A CHRISTIAN TRAINED TO VIRTUE AND REFINEMENT ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL." * The works of this Saint brought him in touch with almost every condition of life—the humblest as well as the most elevated—but his virtue shone in an heroic degree on every occasion.

We have added "AND REFINEMENT" because, having dealings with persons of the noblest rank, with them all he knew how to put in practice the maxims and behaviour most becoming to a Christian who is formed according to the Gospel; "ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL" because all the quotations in this book are drawn, word for word, from his Life, and from the book called "THE SPIRIT OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL." We have only added a few texts from Holy Scripture, upon which these maxims are founded.

At the head of the book a short résumé of the life of the Saint will be like an index of the thoughts to be developed at greater length afterwards.

* "Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civilità, secondo lo spirito di S. Vincenzo di Paoli."

May God, Who has raised up St Vincent as a flaming torch to carry the light of Truth amongst civilized nations, Who willed to call from the people a simple, unknown man, to place him amid His princes so that his heroic virtues might change the aspect of France, and of the whole of Europe; may God grant that the same charity and the same zeal may be kindled in the hearts of ecclesiastics, so that they may become tireless in their efforts for the salvation of souls; may zeal and charity also inflame the hearts of the people, so that, being enlightened by the virtues of the Saint and attracted by the good example of holy priests, they may advance rapidly on the road to the true happiness of Heaven.

DON BOSCO.

PREFACE TO TRANSLATION

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W.1.

THE words of a Saint about a Saint are doubly precious and I earnestly beg God to bless this book and the translator, in which the Blessed Don Bosco recalls the virtues of the Saint whom he imitated with such fidelity in so many ways.

FRANCIS CARDINAL BOURNE,
Archbishop of Westminster.

Feast of the Assumption, 1933.

FOREWORD

Saint Thomas of Aquin, historians relate, had come one day to call on Saint Bonaventure. He was told that his Franciscan friend was just then busy on his Life of Saint Francis. He withdrew at once. " Let us leave," he said, " the Saint, depicting a Saint." This story naturally forces itself upon the mind of everyone who casts a glance upon this estimation of Saint Vincent by Blessed Don Bosco. But Don Bosco did not attempt penning a Life of his hero ; his work was rather an " Introduction to the Devout Life " according to Saint Vincent, and culled from the latter's own writings and biography. Long known and highly appreciated in its original harmonious language, it now comes in English garb at an opportune time. On this Centennial of Ozanam's great foundation, all the world is resounding with the praises of Saint Vincent de Paul, and the coincidal appearance (1932) of the most recent Life of the Apostle of Charity, rivets our gaze on *le Grand Saint dur Grand Siècle*. On the other hand, is not the Catholic world looking eagerly towards the hoped-for Canonization of Blessed Don Bosco ? Most timely and happy, therefore, was the determination of giving to the English-speaking world the fruit of the meditations of the Piedmontese charity-worker upon the Life and teachings of his French hero and model.

Ill would it become me to state to what extent the " Sister of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul," who has undertaken this labour of love, has entered, in her translation, into the Spirit of the two great Servants of God ; suffice it to aver, she has well deserved of both, and of Him who is Charity.

CHARLES L. SOUVAY,
Priest of the Mission, Sup. Gen.

AN HISTORICAL EPITOME OF THE LIFE OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL

ST VINCENT was born in 1576 in the village of Pouy, not far from the Pyrenees, in the diocese of Dax, of poor parents, but pious and esteemed, who gained their livelihood by working in the fields. From his childhood he was occupied in tending cattle. His father, who had noticed the child's excellent nature and his inclination for study, managed, though not without difficulty, to have him educated at Dax, the neighbouring town. St Vincent made such progress in his studies that at the age of seventeen he was engaged by a lawyer as tutor for his children. It was whilst he was training the minds of his privileged pupils that St Vincent felt himself called by God to the ecclesiastical state. He therefore received Minor Orders, and, with the consent of his family, he went first to Toulouse, and then to Saragossa. He studied dogma and moral philosophy in these celebrated Universities for seven years. Being then promoted to the sub-diaconate, the diaconate, and finally ordained priest, he was given a benefice, with charge of souls. But, the right of possession having been contested, he resigned in favour of his opponent, not only because he regarded a lawsuit as dis-

pleasing to God in His servants, but especially because, in his humility, he believed himself incapable of carrying such a heavy burden and considered it a still greater benefit to be released from it.

Some important affairs having called him to Marseilles, he afterwards embarked for Narbonne. During this short crossing he was seized by some pirates, who carried him off to Barbary, where he toiled as a slave under several masters. Finally Providence willed that he should be sold to a renegade from Nice. This man was married to a Turkish woman who, in the designs of God, was intended to deliver her husband from apostasy, and St Vincent from his unhappy slavery.

This woman, evidently moved by God, became curious to know about the Christian Mysteries and Morality, and from time to time she came to inquire of the Saint whilst he was labouring in the fields. Fascinated with the sweet teachings of the Faith, and with all that St Vincent told her about the greatness and goodness and justice of the only true God; touched also by the hymns and canticles which she heard St Vincent singing, she grew so fond of the Religion of Jesus Christ that she herself became a Christian and persuaded her husband to quit the errors of Mohammedanism and re-enter the bosom of the Church.

St Vincent, on his side, multiplied his prayers, fasts and austerities, and never wearied in instilling encouraging thoughts into the mind of his master, until the favourable moment arrived for them to take their flight from Africa. Embarking on a

frail vessel, a favourable wind brought them to the coast of France, where they landed on July 28th, 1607. They went to Avignon, where they received charitable hospitality from Mgr. the Vice-Legate, who took them with him to Rome. This Bishop provided for the needs of the two converts. Having remarked the holiness and the wisdom of St Vincent, he kept him in his own household and treated him with affection and liberality.

After having given free vent to his devotion in the Capital of Christendom, he recommended himself to SS Peter and Paul, the Princes of the Apostles, as he visited the most celebrated sanctuaries of Rome. Then Vincent thanked his benefactor and directed his steps towards Paris. There, under the protection and direction of the celebrated Cardinal Peter de Bérulle, Founder of the Congregation of the Oratory, he accepted the office of tutor to the children of the General of the Galleys.

The Saint remained with this illustrious family in recollection and retirement, occupying himself solely with his duty, and never appearing before the master of the house unless called. Everybody loved and honoured him as an angel of peace, as a man descended from Heaven. Hearing of his virtue, the King nominated him CHAPLAIN OF THE GALLEYS, and this employment pleased him on account of the great number of souls he could gain to God.

He found that these unfortunate galley slaves were more shackled with the weight of their sins than with their chains. He therefore used the most

indefatigable kindness in dealing with them. He conversed in a friendly manner with them, taught them the maxims and truths of the Gospel, distributed little gifts amongst them and, little by little, was able to notice in them more patience and greater resignation; in fact, a notable change in their conduct.

He was so kind and affable to them that these poor prisoners readily confessed to him. He had tender compassion towards all; he practised so many acts of kindness towards them that they no longer felt the weight of their labours; the hardest hearts were touched in the end and all venerated him as a much loved father and were ready to follow his advice and submit to his will in everything.

St Francis of Sales chose him as Superior and Director of the Daughters of the Institute of the Visitation; there, under his guidance, the holy Rules were faithfully observed for thirty-eight years. And by his constancy and meekness he succeeded in fostering all that was good, so that the holy Bishop could not suppress the joy he felt, declaring that nowhere could a wiser man be found, nor a worthier priest.

St Vincent always showed special interest in the field labourers, either for the sake of bettering their hard life or for the salvation of their souls. So that he might never be short of workers to instruct these poor people and lead them into good ways he, with the approval of the Holy See, founded a Congregation of secular priests, under a vow to go from one market town to another, from village

to village, preaching the Divine word to the country people and instructing them in Christian Doctrine without any remuneration whatever. This institute, which is called the "Congregation of the Lazarists," or the "Priests of the Mission," was solemnly approved by Pope Urban VIII in 1632.

Thanks to the co-operation of St Vincent ecclesiastical discipline took a new start and flourished again; thanks to his solicitude order reigned in the seminaries; the theological conferences were zealously attended; the Ordinandi had their preparatory Retreats; St Vincent ever kept an open door to all who wished to join these Retreats. When Louis XIII, who was assisted in his agony by St Vincent, had gone to his eternal rest, Queen Anne of Austria wished that the holy priest should be one of the four counsellors chosen by her to advise on ecclesiastical affairs. In these honourable duties the main thing St Vincent had at heart was to convince the members of this Council of their obligation of never nominating anyone to bishoprics, abbeys or parishes, except those persons who were worthy and capable of carrying out their duties faithfully.

The Christian slaves who were languishing in Barbary experienced the effects of his charity, as also children who were left homeless and abandoned; devout virgins and Religious, who had been dispersed and were in danger; young girls whose misery might have dragged them into evil; women of bad repute, prisoners, travellers, the infirm, the weak-minded, the invalid worker. In

short, St Vincent came to the assistance of suffering humanity, he spared neither fatigues, nor labours, nor assiduous diligence in distributing alms, in setting up hospitals and charitable associations so thoroughly, that they still exist to-day, despite bitter opposition from enemies who would fain abolish them.

All shades of praise, applause or esteem horrified him; if anyone showed any sign of it the Saint knew well how to put it off by some word or act of humiliation and self-contempt. Someone who had received him at his house wished to accompany him to the door on leaving, but he said: "Do not put yourself about, for I am only the son of a poor villager, and kept flocks in my youth."

Another time a good woman asking for alms gave him the title of Monsignore. "Poor woman," he replied, "you little know me, and you are much mistaken; I am only a herdsman, the son of a poor villager."

One of his nephews, shabbily dressed, came to see him; the porter, having told St Vincent, the latter went quickly, embraced his nephew and brought him into the house. Then, having assembled his priests, he said to them: "My nephew, whom you see here, despite his bad clothes, is the most respectable member of the family," and, not being satisfied with this, he went out through Paris with him.

On every occasion the Saint showed himself full of humility, simplicity and uprightness. He always had a horror of honours, dignities, riches, con-

veniences or anything worldly. All his delight was in mortification and the practice of those virtues which might render him more agreeable to God.

Attenuated by penance, he died in Paris in the year 1660 in the eighty-fourth * year of his age.

This is a short résumé of the Life of St Vincent de Paul, upon whose virtues we are going to meditate in this little book. Each one of the faithful will find here a mirror; ecclesiastics will find a rule and a guide; the man of the world an affectionate father, who will encourage him in all that is good, one who will advise him to flee from evil, will console him in his troubles and will inspire him with a spirit of moderation in pleasure and prosperity. In short, all will find in him a truly great man, who knew how to make himself all to all that he might gain all for Jesus Christ.

* Pere Coste, C.M., in his "Life of St Vincent" (1932) gives 1780 as the year of his birth, which would make him 80 years at the time of his death.

VIRTUE AND CHRISTIAN REFINEMENT

FIRST DAY

CHARACTER OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL

IN order to understand the character of a man we must examine him on three points: his physical constitution, his heart, and his mind. Therefore, to form a correct idea of St Vincent, we will consider him from these three points of view.

(1) His Physical Constitution.—St Vincent was of middle height but well proportioned. His head was big, his forehead broad, his eyes bright, his expression very gentle. He had a sedate carriage and an affable manner, which was bestowed on him by Nature and embellished by virtue. In his manners and in his bearing appeared that ingenuous simplicity which manifests true peace and uprightness of heart. His temperament was passionate and hot, his constitution strong and vigorous. On a journey from Marseilles to Narbonne he was taken prisoner and wounded by an arrow from some pirates, who captured the ship and its crew. His captivity in Tunis must have considerably weakened his strong constitution, for

after his return to France he was very sensitive to changes of temperature and subject to frequent discomfort.

(2) His Heart.—St Vincent had a noble, generous, tender heart; very open to compassion, always showing self-control under unforeseen difficulties, and courageous whenever there was question of duty. He was always on his guard against the seduction of honours, ever attentive to the cry of poverty; never evincing coldness nor ill-humour; so much so that he seemed, on the contrary, to have lived only to help the poor and comfort the sorrowful. This kindness of heart bound him in friendship with all those who professed to love virtue sincerely.

Besides that, his mastery over his passions was so absolute that their very existence was scarcely perceptible. He was a tender father, but his tenderness was well regulated; he loved equally every child of his Congregation, and in this family, although it was very numerous, there was never any member who inspired the slightest jealousy in the hearts of his brethren. For a very long time (this fact is certain) there had never been a man who was called upon to occupy himself with so many different duties, which brought him in touch with all kinds of persons of every class and condition. Being exposed continually to the most dangerous occasions, he knew how to keep his whole life not only sheltered from all suspicion, but honoured by universal approbation.

(3) His Mind.—His mind was broad, circum-

spect, apt for great things—it was difficult to take him unawares.

When St Vincent took a matter in hand he went carefully into everything that had reference to it, and found out every circumstance connected with it, whether little or great; he knew how to forestall in advance the inconveniences or consequences thereof. Nevertheless he avoided as far as possible making his opinion known straight away; he first weighed carefully the "for and against," consulting God in prayer and conferring with persons whose experience fitted them to enlighten others. This characteristic, so far removed from what could be called precipitation, saved him from any false step and opened the way to much good.

Any difficulties in his business left him untroubled and without fear; on the contrary, he carried them out with a strength of mind superior to all obstacles; he applied himself with the most enlightened skill, bearing the weight of them, the anxieties and delays, with such tranquillity as great souls alone are capable of.

If he had occasion to deal with some important matter by word of mouth, he listened attentively to those who spoke, without ever interrupting them. If someone came and interrupted him, faithful to the great principle of humility and of politeness, that "one must be silent when another is speaking," he stopped immediately and kept silence until the interrupter had finished. Then at once, with admirable presence of mind, he would resume the thread of his discourse.

His reasoning was just, full of strength and precision; he expressed himself with a certain natural eloquence, calculated to rouse and attract those who were listening to him; he knew all that was necessary when there was question of doing good to others. The most difficult questions, especially those concerning spiritual or religious matters, were explained by him with such order and clearness that the cleverest people were astonished. Being a consummate master in the art of adapting himself to all kinds of characters, of coming down to the level of all capacities, he playfully stammered with the little children and conversed intelligently with the most enlightened men. In unimportant discussions the ordinary man believed himself to be equal to St Vincent. In the handling of the most serious affairs, on the other hand, the greatest geniuses of the century never found him inferior to themselves.

The holy man was an enemy of ambiguous and crooked ways of speaking; he said things just as he thought them, without his frankness ever infringing the rights of prudence.

He knew how to be silent when he thought it useless to speak; never did a word escape him showing bitterness, loss of esteem or charity cooled with regard to anyone whatever.

In general, he was by character antipathetic to all singularity, impulse or novelty. He held to the principle that, when things are going well, there is no need to change them too readily under pretext of improving them. He conformed to the

customs and opinions accepted by all, principally on matters of religion. "*The human mind,*" he said, "*is very quick and restless; the most enlightened minds are not always the best, unless they are very reserved; one walks safely when one does not stray from the path trodden by the greater number of wise men.*"

The exterior of things made little impression on him; he examined carefully their nature, their aim, their consequences, and, thanks to the exquisite sense which controlled his mind, he distinguished, with unusual perfection, between the true and the false, the good and the bad, the best and the less good, even when both were presented to him under the same form and appearance. Hence he derived his extraordinary tact in discerning spirits, and his great penetration of mind in judging the qualities and the defects of those about whom he had to give information; so much so that Le Tellier, Lord Chancellor of France, never spoke of him but with admiration.

St Vincent conducted himself in such a way that he was said to be a perfect observer of justice under every form. He was an enemy of favour in the distribution of benefices and was known to give a public reproof in Council about the choice of a Bishop, and the sequel proved how right he had been in showing opposition.

He was full of zeal for the reputation of his neighbour; if sometimes he was obliged to listen when the faults of others were discussed he was very skilful in his holy way in destroying the bad

impression made, by telling all the good he knew about the accused person.

He was delicate even to scrupulosity with regard to the slightest injury of which he might have been the occasion; he blamed himself even for things which were merely accidental. His coachman having involuntarily dropped some loaves, St Vincent, fearing that they might be more difficult to sell in consequence, had them paid for immediately.

I could quote other facts of the same kind, but they might perhaps appear too unimportant to those who do not know that the Son of God authorizes these recitals, by Himself giving praise for the simple gift of a glass of cold water and for the alms of a poor widow.

The Servant of God was not like those favourites who make a trade and draw profit from the favour of a King by selling, at a very high price, what cost them nothing. One day the governor of an important town asked him to make use of his credit at Court in order to render him a service; and the better to secure this help he promised the Saint he would stand by the Priests of the Mission in the opposition raised against their establishment by very influential persons in the town. "*I will serve you, since I am able to do so,*" answered St Vincent, "*but as to what regards the Gentlemen of the Mission, I beg you to leave that in the Hands of God. I would rather they were not in your town at all than see them there thanks to the favour and credit of men.*"

An enemy of discord and of lawsuits, he strove

always to make peace. Hearing that two families were on the point of a quarrel, he immediately set to work, trying by all means to keep them calm and peaceful. "*A lawsuit*," he said, "*is a difficult morsel to digest, and the best of lawsuits is not worth as much as a reconciliation.*"

One of his relations having of his own accord engaged in an affair, which turned out badly, St Vincent wrote to him: "*We go to law as little as possible, and when we are obliged we do so only after taking counsel within and without; we would rather lose what belongs to us than scandalize our neighbour.*" However, God permitted that the Saint should have to go through several lawsuits, gaining some and losing others, because Providence wished him to be a model for every kind of situation, and those who are litigants need great example. His conduct, in fact, was admirable in lawsuits; he put forward everything favourable to his enemies, without omitting a single iota, showing their reasons very cleverly, better perhaps than they could have done it themselves.

All steps that were taken to conciliate the favour of the judges appeared to him to be little conformed to justice. He said that "*a judge who fears God has no regard for persons.*" He himself, when he belonged to the Queen's Council, said that he made no account of recommendations, but only troubled to find out whether the thing desired was, or was not, conformed to justice.

He managed the interests of those who brought an action against him better than his own interests.

Once he was seen paying the expenses of a lawsuit which he had won; and, besides that, he gratuitously provided his adversaries with food and lodging, and then gave them money enough to take them home.

To complete his portrait it is sufficient to add that he had taken Jesus Christ for his model; it was from the Gospel that he drew all his philosophy, all his refinement, all his policy. This is what St Vincent was, according to the opinion of persons of his day, who were greatly esteemed and best able to judge. If we have given a high idea of him, it will be seen later on, in the course of this little book, that we have merely sketched a marvellous combination of very real virtues.

PRACTICE.—*A recollected manner and reserve in speech are the two foundations upon which we can build up within us a Christian and religious character, on condition also that our words and actions be always regulated according to the maxims of the Gospel.*

SECOND DAY

ST VINCENT IMITATOR OF JESUS CHRIST

OUR Divine Saviour told all the faithful that he who followed in His Footsteps would not walk in darkness, and would be assured of one day possessing the Light of Eternal Life. And He invited all men to follow Him and to take Him as their model of humility and meekness.

St Vincent, being persuaded that the disciple is only perfect in so far as he resembles his Master, wished to have this Divine Model continually before his eyes. He imitated Him in his words and in his actions, following, so far as is given to mortal man, the rough and painful ways taught us by our Saviour. He imitated Him in every advice he had to give, being careful never to give any of which the Son of God might not approve. He imitated Him in his courage, by treading underfoot all self-love, nor did he fear to see his actions deprecated by those who have at heart the glory of mankind rather than the Glory of God. He imitated Him in his perfect submission, receiving good and evil with utter indifference. He imitated Him in his zeal for the salvation of souls, being determined to pursue and cause others to seek out the wander-

ing sheep, even to the gates of hell, if there were any hope of saving them. He imitated Him in his mortifications, and in his poverty, having his eyes always fixed on the Lord, Who in the days of His mortal life had not even a stone whereon to lay His head. Finally, he resembled his Master so well in his whole behaviour that a priest, who had the happiness of living with him for fifty years, declared that he had never heard him utter a single word or perform a single action which was not for God.

A celebrated doctor one day asked a person, who had known the Saint intimately, what had been his special and particular virtue. He answered that it was the Imitation of Jesus Christ; that the Divine Saviour had been his fixed and constant rule, and the book consulted by him in all his actions.

One might have added that he knew how to open this book before the learned as well as the ignorant, before kings as well as their subjects. Louis XIII had proof of this during his last sickness, when he sent for St Vincent. In order to announce to him his approaching death (which so many deluded people try to hide, as far as possible, from the great ones of this world), the Saint said to him, just as he entered his room: "*Timenti Dominum bene erit in extremis*" ("Sir, he who fears God will find Him merciful in his last moments"). This broaching of the subject was no surprise whatever to a king who was accustomed to nourish his soul with the most beautiful maxims of Holy Scripture; finishing the sentence himself, he answered calmly: "*Et in*

die defunctionis suæ benedicetur" ("And on the day of his death he shall be blessed").

Perceiving from his room the place where his body would rest after his death, close to his predecessors, Louis XIII said, "I shall not leave this place until I go down there." St Vincent never lost sight of him during the last days of his life; he encouraged him to lift up his mind and heart to God, near Whom there awaited him a throne and treasures far more durable than those of earth. The Prince, who looked bravely forward to his approaching death, asked our Saint what was the best way to prepare for it. "Sir," answered St Vincent, "it is to imitate the way in which Jesus Christ prepared Himself for His death, and to submit yourself entirely and perfectly, as He did, to the Will of His Heavenly Father." "*Non mea voluntas, sed Tua fiat*" ("Oh, my Jesus, Thy Will be done!"), answered the monarch, who was a true Christian. It was in these good sentiments he gave up his last sigh, in the hands of our Saint, thirty years to the very day after he had ascended the throne.

Thus St Vincent had the Son of God always present to his mind as his model, and that he might more perfectly imitate the annihilation of Jesus he fled from the very shadow of any desire to shine. He recalled on every occasion the lowliness of his descent; he treated himself as an ignoramus and had a horror of vain, pompous language and the display of worldly eloquence.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ," he often repeated,

" was able to give great splendour to His actions, and sublime power to His words; yet He did not will to do so; He did something better, for in order to confound our pride still more, by His extraordinary humiliations, He willed that His disciples should accomplish much more than He did Himself. And wherefore? Why did He wish to be surpassed in His public works? In order to befriend the most lowly and humble, of whom men do not know the value; He wanted to make the Gospel bear fruit, not the applause of the world. Oh, why do we not follow the example of this Divine Master? Why not always give the advantage to others? Why not choose for ourselves what is lowest and most humbling, since that is what is certainly most pleasing in the eyes of Our Lord, and the only thing we should aim at. From this day therefore let us take the resolution to follow Him, and to offer Him little sacrifices. Let us say to Him, and say to ourselves at the same time: 'OF TWO THOUGHTS WHICH MAY COME INTO MY MIND, I WILL ONLY GIVE OUT THE LESS IMPORTANT ONE: IN ORDER TO HUMBLE MYSELF, I WILL KEEP HIDDEN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ONE, TO MAKE OF IT A SACRIFICE TO GOD IN THE SECRET OF MY HEART.' Yes, it is a truth of the Gospel that Our Lord nowhere finds more pleasure than in humility of heart and simplicity of action. There dwells His Spirit, and in vain shall we seek It elsewhere. If therefore you wish to find It, you must absolutely renounce ostentation and the desire of making a show; also luxury in what concerns the mind as

well as the body ; and, in fact, all the vanities and all the satisfactions of life."

Man is born to love God and to do good to his neighbour. Thus we shall see that all St Vincent's thoughts were directed towards these two objects ; towards God, to love Him ; towards his neighbour, to do good to him. " *Transibat benefaciendo* " (" He went about doing good ").

PRACTICE.—*We must resolve to imitate Jesus Christ and to follow Him in His Sufferings ; otherwise we shall never arrive at a share in His Glory.* " *QUI VULT GAUDERE CUM CHRISTO OPERTET PATI "CUM CHRISTO." He who wishes to rejoice with Christ, must first suffer with Christ.*"

THIRD DAY

CHARITY OF ST VINCENT TOWARDS THE POOR

THE virtue which specially marks out a Christian is charity. Without this virtue, says St John, man is like a dead body, incapable of motion. St Paul calls it the most beautiful and the greatest of all the virtues, since it is charity which lifts man up to the angels.

This virtue was inseparable from all the works performed by St Vincent. He began to practise Charity whilst he was so young that one might say it was born in him. If he happened to meet anyone in distress he was greatly touched, and gave all that he possessed. Sometimes he deprived himself of his own food to give it to the poor. One day he came across one who seemed to him so pitiful that he gave him thirty coppers, which in itself is a modest sum, but was a considerable one for a child who had spent a long time in saving it up, bit by bit.

Such were St Vincent's first endeavours (he was only twelve years old) at practising that charity which, later on, was to operate such prodigies. We may mention here, in passing, that the Servant of God founded hospitals, associations of Charity,

Confraternities of Ladies, and that by these different means he succeeded in procuring for an infinite number of poor, both sick and healthy, the help which they required.

Moreover, his great works, which were such a boon to the unfortunate, are still existing to this day. These pious foundations, which do so much honour to France and to Italy, express better than we can the very great charity of St Vincent. Those holy works revive and diffuse his spirit everywhere. Our own city of Turin glories in possessing one of these Refuges, dedicated to St Vincent de Paul, in which hundreds of poor, paralysed, insane, orphans, infirm, deaf mutes, etc., find comfort in their misery.*

It is written of the holy man Job that he never refused the poor what they needed; that he never let the widow wait in vain; that he never ate his bread alone, but shared it with the orphan; that he never forgot to relieve those who, for want of clothing, were dying of cold. *This is the portrait of our Saint.* On hearing that half the population of Palaiseau were sick, and that ten or twelve persons were dying every day, and that this place was in need of a Priest and of all kinds of provisions, he immediately dispatched, at his own expense, four of his Priests with a doctor. Then nearly every day he sent a cart laden with flour, wine, meat and other provisions. Thus he spent all the money he

* This book was first printed in Turin, where Don Bosco lived; hence the reference to the "Cottolengo Institute—the House of Divine Providence" under the protection of St Vincent de Paul, in which were gathered over five thousand poor afflicted and abandoned.

possessed, and when he had nothing more to give he begged alms from the rich.

Scarcely had he provided for the needs of Palaiseau when the inundations on the borders of the Seine afforded an equally vast field for his charity. The inhabitants of a town, finding it impossible to leave their houses, were in great distress, and this was increased by the fact that they could not send out anyone to procure assistance. St Vincent, who knew the topographical situation of that country, and who guessed what had happened, did not wait to get more definite news, but immediately sent off a van laden with bread. He did the same thing next day, and as long as the floods lasted he never ceased to send relief. At the same time his Missioners, risking their lives on boats, went through all the flooded streets, distributing victuals to the inhabitants, who took them in through the windows of their houses whilst offering most fervent thanksgivings to their benefactors.

The charity of St Vincent was not confined to the necessities of the poor in the country; those in Paris and the suburbs had an equal share of his compassion and alms. It suffices to mention the numberless orphans whom he received at various times and maintained in St Lazare; the tramps to whom he distributed bread and money; those persons whose shame prevented them from asking alms (but whom St Vincent's charity knew how to seek out, and for whom he arranged that they should secretly receive money or provisions, according to their need); also the great number of poor

to whom clothing was distributed, the prisoners he went to instruct, the charitable practice he introduced into St Lazare of having two poor old men every day at his table, etc. We must not omit the daily regular alms he gave from the very first existence of the Congregation ; he had distributions made of bread, soup and money to all the families who sent begging for it ; and after them, to all the poor who presented themselves, and whose number sometimes amounted to eight hundred.

To form a true idea of St Vincent's charity we must remember that at this period the House of St Lazare suffered considerable damage from the troops, who during the troublous times in Paris carried off everything which might be useful to them, and that several of St Vincent's farms were thus sacked and destroyed. Nevertheless he never ceased the daily distributions to the poor.

On the other hand, he had not acted like the prudent of this world, who are always careful to put aside a sum of money for unforeseen needs ; he would have thought that a want of confidence in the Providence of God. After having given away everything, his only expedient was to borrow that he might continue his good works.

Knowing all this, one will not be surprised to hear the following stories related :

A soldier who was quite unknown to St Vincent, having asked him to receive him into his house for a few days, fell ill there. St Vincent had him installed in a room with a fire, and nursed by a Brother of his Congregation until he was com-

pletely cured; that is to say, for the space of two months.

A carter having explained his difficulties through the loss of his horses, St Vincent immediately gave him one hundred francs. Another time he had only just received forty florins when he at once gave them to a poor man in great distress.

If he happened to meet with some unfortunate persons who had no shelter, he would take them up into the miserable carriage which his infirmities had obliged him to make use of and bring them to some lodging.

Sometimes debtors or tenants in straitened circumstances were liable to prosecution and expenses which they could not meet; the Saint found some benefactor to free them from their embarrassment. One might therefore justly call him the "Father of the Poor." He deserved this title, not only on account of the promptitude, universality and perseverance of his charity, but also for the sentiments of kindness and humility with which it was accompanied. 'I am in trouble about our Community," he said one day, "but still more about the poor. What will become of them? I declare to you that they are a great burden and a great sorrow to my heart."

Such was his compassion for the poor. Could we be surprised by *any* kindness in a man who has done so much for them? Nevertheless, sometimes the surprising happens; for example, when we see him overwhelmed with business and not able to walk without pain, and yet going downstairs

from his room to give some relief to poor women to whom he had promised to send it, and going on his knees to ask their pardon for having forgotten them for the moment.

PRACTICE.—*It is impossible to admire all these brilliant proofs of touching charity and not feel ourselves drawn to do something similar. Let us be on our guard, however, lest, after this reading, all does not end in a passing emotion, but let our resolutions be practical; on the first occasion that offers let us show that we are responsive and at the same time charitable towards our neighbour who is obliged to have recourse to us.*

FOURTH DAY

ST VINCENT'S LOVE OF GOD

IN order to appreciate fully St Vincent's love of God we should be perfectly acquainted with the working of the Holy Spirit in his soul, and his fidelity in co-operating with the lights which he received. This manifestation, which is begun on earth by the Will of God, Who offers the virtues of a Saint for the veneration and imitation of Christians, will not be perfected until the last day, when He will reveal the secrets of all hearts. Nevertheless, even in this world there is, according to the expression of the Apostle St John, an infallible mark of a creature who loves God: "IT IS THE CONSTANT OBSERVANCE OF HIS HOLY LAW."

St Vincent fulfilled always, with exemplary exactitude, all the duties imposed by this law. Perfectly united to God, as was visible in his whole exterior, he regulated all his actions according to the commandments of that Eternal Law whence all justice proceeds. His life was one continual sacrifice which he made to God of honours, of the pleasures of the world, and of all his affections. His heart never felt such sensible joy as when he directed his attention towards the Ineffable Glory

which God possesses in Himself. His most ardent desire was that God should be better known and adored in every place and by every creature. All that he said or did had no other aim than to inspire all with Divine Love.

Hence those tender aspirations which from time to time escaped his lips: "Oh, my Saviour! . . . Oh, my Lord! Oh, Divine Goodness! . . . Oh, my God! . . . when wilt Thou grant us the Grace to belong entirely to Thee, to love but Thee alone?" Hence also the care he took to purify his intention and to remind himself that the least of our actions, as well as the greatest, belongs to the Creator.

So that he might please God in most important matters he studied to please Him in the smallest. On this point he was so watchful that, according to those who observed him most closely, to think less of self he would have needed to be no longer a mortal man.

Hence also proceeded that vigour of speech which penetrated the very hearts of those who listened to him. This is so true that one day a lady, having heard him speak, was astounded and said to the Queen of Poland: "Well, Madame, can we not say, like the disciples of Emmaus, that we felt the Love of God kindling in our hearts whilst Mr. Vincent was speaking to us? I declare to you that my heart is aglow with all that the holy man has just told us." . . . "You need not be surprised," answered the Queen; "he is the angel of the Lord, who carries on his lips the fiery coals of Divine Love which burn in his heart."

Amongst the crowd of ecclesiastics who hastened week by week to the Conferences organized by St Vincent, many have declared that they went there principally to have the happiness of listening to him; that they came back disappointed if, through modesty, the Saint had not consented to speak. His words contained such (shall I call it) "unction" of the Holy Ghost that they touched the hearts of all who were present. Several spoke about him to his Missioners, saying, "Oh, how happy you are to see and hear every day a man so full of the Love of God!" And, indeed, this holy man infused the flame of his charity into the very soul of those who conversed with him. "There could not be found," says the Archbishop of Vienna (in his letter to Clement IX, January 1st, 1676), "any discourse or pious lecture capable of producing an impression equal to that which he made on those who had the happiness of talking with him. Even children, who are so easily wearied with serious discourses, took pleasure in listening to him." Also Mgr. de Brienne wrote to the Sovereign Pontiff (November 13th, 1705): "I was very young when I first made acquaintance with the venerable old man, who showed great friendliness towards my family, but I had already, like many others, formed such a high idea of his sanctity that the course of many years has never obliterated the remembrance of those conversations."

An obstinate sinner was sent to one of the Missioners, that the latter might turn him to better sentiments, but without success, for the habits of

evil had become second nature to this sinner. The priest presented him to St Vincent, not unlike the man who was possessed by a devil, and whom the disciples presented to Our Saviour when they could not cure him. The Servant of God talked to this unhappy man, whose mind was afflicted with an inveterate disease; he pressed him with arguments, shook his self-confidence, brought shame to his conceit and had the consolation of seeing part of the mist clear away which was blinding him. Very soon the first glimmerings of a new man began to appear; the son of iniquity was groaning under his chains; he begged for the benefit of a Retreat in order to disengage himself; he made the Retreat fervently, and henceforth lived up to the hopes which he had raised. Finally he thanked his benefactors and published everywhere that it was Mr. Vincent who had changed his heart.

With regard to God, the Saint did not content himself with a sentimental, affectionate love, nor with producing in his soul elevated thoughts on the Goodness of God and ardent desires for His Glory; but he rendered this love *fruitful* and, as St Gregory desires, he gave proof of it by his works: "*Probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis*" ("The proof of Love is in the doing"). It was for this reason that the holy Priest exhorted his confrères to love God with the strength of their arm and the sweat of their brow, because, he often added, many acts of the Love of God and many other loving transports, although very good and desirable, may easily be suspected of insincerity if they are not accom-

panied by a *practical* love. "My Father is glorified, says Our Saviour, when much fruit is produced, and on this point we must be well on our guard, for there are many who, whilst having a very calm exterior, and their heart full of good sentiments, go no further and remain idle when the occasion presents itself. They let themselves be deceived by the ardour of their imagination; they content themselves with the sweet communication they have with God in prayer, and speak of Him as if they were angels; but as soon as there is question of labouring for the Love of God, of mortifying themselves, of instructing the poor, of going in search of the wandering sheep, of bearing patiently with sickness or any other disgrace, then their courage fails and they draw back. No! No! let us not be under any illusion: '*Totum opus nostrum operatione consistit*' ('The value of our work consists in doing it well'). I have learnt this truth from a great servant of God. On his death-bed he declared to me that he perceived clearly at this supreme moment that, very often, what some persons look upon as contemplation, ravishment, ecstasies, elevations, or spiritual unions, were really nothing but smoke, and that all proceeded from a deceitful curiosity, or the natural impulse of a mind with some disposition towards what is good; whilst on the contrary a *good action* is the true mark of the Love of God—'*Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit*.' The Apostle teaches us that good actions alone will accompany us to the other life. Let us reflect on it all the more because in our time there are many

who appear virtuous, and are so in fact, and nevertheless they are inclined to a sweet, soft life rather than to a solid and practical devotion."

"The Church is compared to a great harvest which has need of labourers. There is nothing so conformed to the Gospel as to gather light and strength through prayer, reading and solitude, and then to distribute to men this spiritual food. This is doing what Our Lord did, and His Apostles after Him; this is uniting the rôles of Martha and Mary; it is imitating the dove that takes for herself half of the food which she has picked up and passes on the rest out of her beak to that of her little ones, to nourish them. That is how we must show God by our works that we love Him—'*Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.*'"

Consequently the Saint always represented to himself Our Lord Jesus Christ in his neighbour, in order to excite himself more efficaciously to render him all duties of charity. It was Our Divine Saviour, Head of the Church, Whom he beheld in the Sovereign Pontiff; Our Lord, Supreme Pontiff, in the Bishops; Our Lord, Prince of Shepherds, in the Priests; Our Lord King, in the Sovereign; Our Lord Nobleman, in the nobility; Our Lord Judge, in the magistrates and the other public officers. The Kingdom of Heaven being in the Gospel compared to a Merchant, the Saint considered God as such in business people; as a Workman in the artisan; as a Poor Man in the beggar; as Infirm in the sick; as Agonizing in the dying. Thus, seeing Jesus Christ in all the

different states in which the neighbour appeared, he urged himself to love and serve the creatures of Our Lord, and Our Lord in them all. He also exhorted all those to whom he spoke to put this maxim in practice, and so render more perfect their charity towards God and towards man.

In fine, he made it his principle to do everything for the Love of God, and never to do anything through human considerations.

The Love of God being incompatible with human respect, St Vincent could not bear anyone to act with the view of pleasing men. One of his Missioners, who was staying temporarily in Rome, had been entrusted by the Sovereign Pontiff to give some Missions. In order to curry favour with the Cardinals he conceived the idea of beginning to give these Missions on their lands. He wrote to St Vincent to that effect; but he answered that such a way of acting was human and opposed to Christian simplicity. "Oh, God! may the Lord preserve us from doing anything through such low motives! His Divine Goodness requires that we should never do good in any place to render ourselves illustrious, but that we should look directly to Him, and without any medium in all our actions. Be quite sure that the maxims of Jesus Christ and the example of His Life never lead us astray; and that they yield their fruit in due season . . . and that nothing succeeds with him who acts according to the contrary maxims."

The horror which the Saint felt at the conduct of those acting through worldly motives was the

cause one day of one of those outbursts of sadness which reveal the habitual dispositions of the heart. One of his own priests had accused himself, in the presence of the others, of having performed some action through human motives. St Vincent was grieved to hear that a Missioner could have another motive but God. "It would be better," he said, "to be thrown into a burning cauldron with one's hands and feet tied than to perform an action with the intention of pleasing men."

He pitied the folly of those who, being full of worldly intentions, only lose their time and their labour, which if lifted up to God would become so fruitful and so salutary. "The intention," he said, "is the soul of our works; it increases their value in a sovereign degree."

And again: "Clothing is not generally valued so much for the material of which it is made as for the gold trimmings and rich embroidery, pearls and precious stones with which it is ornamented; in the same way we must not be content with merely performing good works, but we must enrich and set them off through the merit of a very high and holy intention, doing them solely to please God and glorify Him."

The intentions of St Vincent being thus purified, kindled in him a very ardent desire to work for the Glory of God, and to lead others to share his sentiments on this point. He wished that every true disciple of Jesus Christ should render an account to himself of the motives which prompted his actions; that he should interrogate himself

before beginning each one, saying to himself: "Through what motive are you undertaking such or such a thing? Would it be, by chance, to give pleasure to yourself, or to some weak creature? Is it with the sole intention of accomplishing the Will of God and of following the impulse of His Holy Spirit?" "How glorious would our life be," he said to his priests, "if only we had the splendid habit of willing everything in God, and all for God! Our life would resemble that of angels more than men. It would be quite divine in a sense, because all our actions would be done under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, and by His Grace."

The whole life of this Saint clearly shows that he acted constantly according to this rule; and it will be still more evident in the recital of the great things we shall reveal later.

PRACTICE.—*An alms for the Love of God; or a* Pater, *an* Ave *and a* Gloria *to the Most Holy Sacrament.*

FIFTH DAY

ST VINCENT'S CHARITY TO THE GALLEY SLAVES

CERTAINLY the needs of the poor country people were, above all, the object of St Vincent's charitable zeal; but they did not exhaust it. On the contrary, we may say that everything which bore the impress of misery became his special business. He needed neither solicitation nor importunate requests; he went himself in search of the most unfortunate, and hastened to help even those who had never dreamt of imploring his charity. Scarcely had he returned from the Missions to rest after a very fatiguing ministry but he would go and visit the hospitals and the prisons, lavishing on the prisoners and the sick all the services he could render them. A special attraction always brought him where he found most wounds to be cured; that was why he wanted to know how the slaves were treated in Paris before they were brought to Marseilles. He was taken into the darkest prisons; he certainly thought he would find much misery there, but he found a great deal more than he had foreseen. He gave us some idea in a few short words of the miserable state of these unfortunate men, shut up in dark deep dungeons:

"They are devoured by disgusting vermin; they are worn out by sufferings and misery, utterly disfigured in body and soul."

Treatment so utterly opposed to Christianity and to humanity itself touched the holy priest very acutely. He did not disguise the fact that the remedy for such a great evil would cost much. It was a question of helping a very great number of sufferers; and, on the other hand, one had to sweeten their lot without screening them from justice. It was necessary to put the salutary fear of the judgments of God into men who had never thought of it; to teach a crowd of souls hardened in evil how to sanctify, by love and patience, those very sufferings which were embittering them and were to them an immediate and continual occasion of blasphemy and despair. Happily for them, St Vincent did not understand the meaning of difficulty when there was question of the Glory of God or the comfort of the afflicted.

With his heart still full of the emotion caused by these sad sights, he spoke on the subject to Mr. De Gondi, General of the Galleys. He represented to him that these guilty men were under his authority, and that besides providing them with means to take them to their destination it should be part of his charity not to leave them without some consolation. Then he proposed a way of assisting them corporally and spiritually. Mr. De Gondi approved of everything and gave St Vincent full power to put his plan into execution.

The Saint therefore hired a house, in which he

gathered together all the slaves who were dispersed through the various prisons in the city. Having no other resources for this good work but those of Divine Providence, he made use of all his friends who were in a position to help him to cover expenses. The Bishop of Paris wished to associate himself with this work, and by a mandate of June 1st, 1618, he enjoined the rectors, curates and preachers of the whole city to recommend this holy enterprise to the faithful. At the same time the activity displayed by St Vincent was not without result, for he had many imitators ; so much so that, after having remedied the material needs, he found himself able to help those of the soul also.

And so he often visited the slaves and talked to them of God, with a vigour full of sweetness ; he instructed them on the truths of Faith, and on their duties ; he made them understand that their pain, all undesired as it was, might be supported in such a way as to be meritorious. He added that patience would considerably diminish its bitterness, and that in truth there were no real pains except those that would punish final impenitence during all eternity.

These discourses made a great impression on men who were not accustomed to hear such things, and the charitable care of which they were the continual object contributed not a little to win their attention. Very soon many signs of sincere repentance were perceptible. After a time the general confessions completed what the exhortations had begun. St Vincent had the consolation of seeing men who had forgotten God for many long years

approaching the Sacraments with dispositions which might edify persons already advanced on the road to piety and virtue.

Such a change, whilst exalting the powerful Hand of God in a most visible manner, also did great honour to our Saint, both in Paris and at the Court. It was inconceivable how one man alone could succeed in mastering so many others, how he could be clever enough to subjugate hearts that were naturally so wild, and how he was able to dispatch, without truce or rest, so many duties, and such various and dangerous ones. Indeed the Saint spent a considerable time every day with the slaves, rendering them all sorts of services. He never drew back on account of the contagious illnesses with which they were attacked; on the contrary, it was then he shut himself up with them that he might be better able to console and help them. If some other business which was overwhelming called him elsewhere, he left the care of these unfortunate men to two virtuous ecclesiastics who were animated with the same spirit as himself. They went to live in this new hospital for slaves, celebrated Mass there, and cultivated the good seed which our Saint had so happily sown in that desert ground. As for himself, he left them for as short a time as possible. His treasure was in that soil so newly cultivated, and he continually kept it in mind. Mr. De Gondi, who was also surprised and edified at the good order established by St Vincent amongst men who had never had the slightest notion of it hitherto, resolved to let all the galley

slaves in the kingdom profit by the same advantage. He made known to the King the wonderful tact and zeal of our Saint, and gave him to understand that with the support of the Court he would not fail in realizing everywhere similar results. Louis XIII willingly agreed to such a just proposal and nominated St Vincent "ROYAL AND GENERAL CHAPLAIN TO ALL THE GALLEYS."

In 1622 St Vincent started for Marseilles to help the poor galley slaves there.

On the very threshold was presented a spectacle that would make one think of hell. One saw these unfortunate creatures huddled up, suffering from despair. The Saint experienced deep emotion at the sight, but he did not stop at a sterile compassion.

This kind father went to visit these unhappy men, listening with great patience to their lamentations, weeping with those who wept, kissing their chains, and washing them with his tears ; adding, as far as possible, alms and deeds to his words, and thus reaching their hearts.

He talked also to the officers and the employers and induced them to treat with more respect those men who had already so much to suffer. His charitable care did not remain unrewarded ; from that time there was seen on the one hand more humanity, and on the other more submission. The spirit of peace was established little by little ; then complaints were calmed, and at last the ordinary chaplains could speak freely about God and spiritual matters and convince them that even slaves are capable of virtue.

The Saint gave a Mission at Bordeaux. Mr. De Gondi having brought ten galleys there, St Vincent chose ten of the best evangelical workers and sent them out again, two by two, amongst all the galley slaves. As for himself, he was present everywhere; he converted a Mussulman, who, in gratitude for such a great benefit, honoured him always as a father. He had besides the consolation of seeing a great number of slaves converted in all the sincerity of their heart.

St Vincent went to Paris, where he achieved the same good by starting a hospital for slaves. Divine Providence came to his aid in a marvellous way by inspiring a virtuous person to bequeath a sum of ten thousand francs as rent for the new establishment. There was an understanding that the Administrator-General of St Lazare should be in perpetual charge of the temporalities of this hospital; that the Daughters of Charity should have the care of the unhappy slaves, and especially the sick ones; that every year there would be a sum of three hundred pounds allotted to several of the priests attached to the service, with the obligation of rendering all those services to the slaves which had been done heretofore gratis by the priests of the Mission. The zeal of these holy ecclesiastics did not slacken St Vincent's own zeal for the salvation of the slaves.

He busied himself with the Missions given occasionally, but especially at the time they were on the point of being conducted to the galleys, that is to say, the moment in which they had greatest

need of resignation, and when it was most opportune to dispose them to make a good use of their trials.

His tenderness towards them was not limited to these preliminary attentions, but he comforted them in those very places where they had most to suffer. The sad situation of the slaves who fell ill at Marseilles had touched him keenly. Entirely abandoned, riveted to their chains, overwhelmed with the weight of suffering, a prey to consumption through dirt and infection, these living corpses experienced all the horrors of the tomb. St Vincent could not without deep emotion see men who were formed in the Image of God, Christians, purchased by the Blood of Jesus Christ, reduced to dying worse than animals.

He had recourse to Cardinal Richelieu ; he gave him a picture of the frightful state of the slaves in Marseilles during their sickness, and he pressed the necessity of founding a hospital for them. The Cardinal got the King to approve this project. Louis XIII assigned for the maintenance of this hospital an income of twelve thousand francs, to be taken from the revenues of the province, and the Hospital of Marseilles soon became one of the most comfortable in the kingdom ; it contained about three hundred beds. The sick were nursed by other slaves, who were superintended by guardians. The Priests of the Mission had charge of them spiritually. This establishment was a source of benediction for all the slaves, so that even the Mohammedans were touched by the Saint's charity in their regard, and

rendered homage to a religion which, in Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ, formed a spiritual link between all nations.

The Duchess of Aiguillon had given the priests of the Mission fourteen thousand francs on condition that one of their number should take charge of instructing the slaves, and should give them Missions every five years, whether the galleys were at Marseilles or at any other port in the kingdom. Thus St Vincent, a humble and a poor priest, set in motion all the influential people in the kingdom to procure the most active help for these unfortunate men, whom he regarded as his dearest brethren.

"The fruits of the Mission," wrote the Bishop of Marseilles to the Duchess of Aiguillon, "have surpassed all expectations. In the beginning we met with ignorant minds, so obstinate in their sinfulness and so irritated by their miserable state that they would not in any way hear God spoken of . . . but little by little the Grace of God, united to the efforts of the Missioners, has softened their hearts so completely that now they show as much contrition as formerly they showed obstinacy. You would be astonished, Madame, if you knew how many of them have been for years and years without confession. There were some who had not been to confession for twenty-five years, and protested that they would do nothing so long as they were in chains; but in the end Our Lord became their Master, and has driven Satan from these souls, over whom he had usurped so much power. I

praise God for having inspired you to do such a great thing for Him in financing this Mission. It was the arrival of these Missioners which made me decide to hold this Mission immediately ; otherwise I might have deferred it until some other time, and then perhaps several of these unhappy slaves would have died in their miserable state. I cannot express to you all the blessings which these poor slaves shower on all those who co-operate in procuring them such salutary help. I am seeking now for means to keep them in the good dispositions in which they are at present. Now I must go and give Absolution to four heretics who were converted in the galleys (through the care of Mr. Vincent) ; there are others in the same disposition, for all these extraordinary facts have made a great impression on them all."

On another Mission about thirty heretics made their abjuration. One Turk was baptized on the galleys ; and nine others were conducted, with more solemnity, to the Cathedral Church, where they were cheered by the populace, blessing God. The aim of the Missioners in using so much solemnity on this ocassion was to move another Turk, who seemed to be hesitating. The conversion of these ten Mussulmen had been preceded by seven others, who had been baptized by the Bishop of Marseilles.

How precious must have been these successes to Him Who leaves the ninety-nine sheep in the desert to go in search of the one that is lost ! The Missioners gave Missions from time to time on the

galleys, either at Marseilles or at Toulon; all of them checked much evil and increased the number of the elect.

PRACTICE.—*Let him who is not able to expend his zeal in comforting prisoners expend it in saving the slaves of the devil by inducing them, through exhortations and good advice, to give up sin and reinstate themselves in the Grace of God.*

SIXTH DAY

SERVICES RENDERED BY ST VINCENT TO ALL SORTS OF PERSONS

ST VINCENT exercised as much charity towards Religious as to Secular Priests. Far from thinking that their humble state was any reason why they should be less esteemed, he found in this consideration motives for showing them the most marked veneration. He was well on his guard never to impute to the whole body (a wrong as unjust as it is common) the downfall of one of its members. He was not ignorant of the fact that those who can forgive nothing would be pitiable indeed, if one were to employ in their regard the same measure as they deal out to others. Busy as he was, he never lost his time in looking for the faults of others for whom he was not responsible; he saw these faults only when they were self-evident. He conjured his priests, in the Name of Jesus Christ, to profess the greatest respect towards all Religious Orders within the Church, to banish from their mind all envy, jealousy, and other like passions, which are not in harmony with humility nor with that charity which everyone owes to his neighbour. He expressed all these sentiments by

these remarkable words, which he often repeated: "I would rather lose a hundred establishments than prove an obstacle to any Religious Order whatever."

His tender affection for the Regulars was shown by the efforts he made to bring back to the Primitive Observance those who had wandered from it. A great number of Religious Houses still exist to-day as a glorious monument to the activity and extent of his charity. It was not limited to a few Communities only, but it reached isolated Houses, and even individual Religious. However, his love for the Religious state was neither weak nor blind. He did not approve of anyone passing from one Order to another without some very serious reasons, but he wished that each one should sanctify himself in his own vocation. He wrote to a Regular priest: "I share your troubles; have patience, Rev. Father, and beg it of Our Lord. He will bring it about that the Order in which He has placed you, like a tossing vessel, will conduct you easily to port. I cannot grant your desire that I should recommend to God the idea you have of changing to another Order, because it does not seem to me to be conformed to the Will of God. There are crosses everywhere, and your advanced age should make you avoid those which you would meet in changing your state." From this we may judge the joy St Vincent experienced on seeing a great number of Religious Houses returning to what they had been in their best days; and what sorrow he felt when he saw some sacrificing their conscience to the

attractions of a false and culpable liberty. Of all the numerous services rendered by our Saint to a large number of monasteries none were published, except those that he could not conceal. Besides those which he rendered to the Knights of Malta (and for which he was thanked by a letter from the Grand Master, Paul Lascaris, of the family of the Countess de Vintimille and descended from the old Emperors of Constantinople), he was happy also to help the Friars Minor, and it was in consideration of these services that their General sent St Vincent some letters of aggregation, in virtue of which he was to have a share in the prayers, sacrifices, fasts and indulgences of the entire Order.

All the efforts made by St Vincent to introduce amongst Religious men a rigorous respect for rule and discipline were more zealous still with regard to nuns, to re-establish or preserve exact discipline amongst them. He knew, like St Cyprian, that the more the Virgins who are consecrated to God do honour to the Church by the regularity of their manners, the more necessary it is to strengthen them against their own weakness, and he was not ignorant that bad example, which is always contagious, is much more so where persons are more exposed to its influence. For this reason he always took care to place at their head Abbesses or Superioresses who owed their vocation, not to flesh and blood, but solely to the Will of God.

Being convinced that the fervour or tepidity of Religious Communities usually depends on those who are at the head of the Houses, he always strove

to have those named as Superiors who were most capable, most experienced and the most exact in observing the Rule. Thus when certain Abbesses, under pretext of advanced age or sickness, asked to have as coadjutrix their sister, or niece, or other relation, to whom they were too much attached, the holy man, being the declared enemy of worldly attachments, would consider nothing but the Glory of God, and whatever people might say or do he was immovable on this point. He gave as his reason that, when the office of Abbess became vacant through death, there was a splendid opportunity of choosing a virtuous Religious, capable of maintaining good order, if already existing in the Community, or re-establishing it if not there; whilst very often by these kinds of substitutes a Religious possessing little virtue succeeds another who had not much more.

The good works of which we have hitherto spoken did not make St Vincent forget the Daughters of St Francis de Sales. He visited them several times, and found amongst them much that was most sweet and consoling through their piety and union. These holy Daughters have since declared that the presence of St Vincent in their midst had always been a source of grace and benediction to them, and this was because in all truth he possessed, in a special degree, the rare gift of comforting them in their trials; and several amongst them, who were seriously troubled in mind, found peace after conversing with St Vincent. St Frances de Chantal herself owned that the lights and counsels of this

great Servant of God had been a great help to her for her own particular conduct, and also for the direction of her Order.

The activities of St Vincent were so varied that they almost savour of the miraculous. For example, besides the numerous services he rendered to Communities of men and women, we find him engaged in services to armies and to those countries which were the theatre of war; on this head alone he is in no way behind all those who have done most honour to Holy Church and have been the most signal benefactors of suffering humanity.

During a bloody war an epidemic broke out which claimed a great number of victims, who were deprived of the last consolations of religion. St Vincent sent twenty of his Missioners, whom he encouraged by these words: "The plague has broken out in the army," he wrote to one amongst them; "therefore go, sir, in the same spirit as St Francis Xavier went to the Indies, and, like him, you will win the crown which Jesus Christ has purchased for you by His Blood, and which He will bestow on you if you do honour to His charity."

The zeal of these worthy priests in the exercise of their holy ministry drew down the blessings of Heaven upon their works. They themselves endured the fatigues with exemplary courage. A few months later four thousand soldiers approached the Sacraments shedding abundant tears. Several priests were attacked by the contagion in their midst, but God wished to preserve them in His Church for the good of souls.

During another war a crowd of unfortunate people were dying of misery; St Vincent, with his heart full of charity and with tears in his eyes, presented himself to the Queen and to other pious persons to obtain some help. He himself gave the example of a holy and generous liberality. He saved the life, and especially the dignity, of the inhabitants of twenty-five towns, and rendered the same services in an incalculable number of hamlets and villages that were reduced to the last extremity. The sick received every help they could possibly expect from his paternal charity. He also procured clothing for a prodigious number of persons of every age and sex, not only amongst the common people, but also amongst some young persons of noble birth, who were in great danger; so also he assisted some monks whose monasteries had been pillaged, and holy women consecrated to God.

In his distribution of alms the Saint adopted the measures dictated by his consummate prudence. He sent twelve of his Missioners, who were full of zeal and intelligence, into different parts of the country. He also sent several Brothers of the Congregation who had some knowledge of remedies against the plague, as well as a certain skill in medicine and surgery. He gave them wise and most detailed regulations, by means of which it was impossible for them to irritate anyone, whether Bishop, Priest, Head of Department or Magistrate; for the regulations prescribed that the Missioners should consult them so as to avoid mistakes, and to adapt the distributions to the needs and con-

dition of the recipients. The holy ardour which he communicated to the wealthy families in Paris urged them to make such sacrifices during twenty years as posterity will find it difficult to credit. Nevertheless, as the trouble was almost universal and the need extreme, it was necessary to multiply the help given by clever management. It was a considerable amount in itself, but still far below the needs of that unhappy country.

We will limit ourselves to relating, from amongst thousands of extraordinary facts (which would take too long to quote), what happened in Metz. The poor there were like an army in numbers. Every morning there were found ten or twelve persons who had died of starvation, without counting those who, being caught in out-of-the-way places, became the prey of wild beasts; for rapacious wolves were one of the plagues by which God tried these unfortunate people. Getting accustomed to feed on corpses, the wolves later on raided the living when the dead failed them; they made their attacks in broad daylight, tore to pieces and devoured women and children. The hamlets and villages were infested by them in a frightful way; they even entered the towns during the night, through the breaches in the walls, and went off again, carrying with them all they could get.

Night and day the holy priest concerned himself about these calamities, and was busy seeking remedies. He had immense sums of money distributed through the country, also materials, clothing and coverlets. Never did anybody better

deserve the name of FATHER OF THE POOR. The province of Lorraine ought to transmit to its inhabitants from generation to generation the fact that most of them owe their existence to him, because he saved the lives of their fathers. This fact was perpetuated by the gratitude of the magistrates in nearly every town that was helped by him. They thanked the Saint, in the name of their brethren, in the words of St Paul when thanking Philemon for having helped the servants of God in their extreme misery : "*Quia viscera sanctorum requieverunt in te.*"

PRACTICE.—*If we wish our pity to resemble that of the Saints let us have it at heart to help our neighbour when he is in need. The devil, to deceive us, advises us to have anxious thoughts about the future, and tempts us to save up in case of unforeseen reverses ; that is worldly prudence. The Lord speaks clearly to us when He says "that he who wishes to be His true disciple must give to the poor all that remains after he has taken what is necessary"* : "Quod superest, date pauperibus."

SEVENTH DAY

CONVERSIONS BROUGHT ABOUT BY ST VINCENT DE PAUL

WHEN St Vincent became a slave he had several different masters in succession, and was finally sold at Tunis to a renegade who was originally from Nice. This master employed St Vincent in field labour, and naturally the Saint must have thought he was far from regaining his liberty. Nevertheless the moment was nearer than he thought, for it was the conversion of his master and mistress which would restore it to him. The latter was a Moslem woman, but, perceiving in the modesty and patience of the slave something great, to which she was not accustomed, she often went to see him in the fields, where he was working, and she addressed a thousand questions to him about the Religion of the Christians, their customs, and their ceremonies. One day she commanded him to sing the praises of the God whom he adored. As a scholar he was fully acquainted with the Psalms; he had no trouble in remembering those touching words dictated by sorrow to the Israelites when they were prisoners in Babylon. He sang the Psalm "Super flumina Babylonia," then the

"Salve Regina," and other similar songs, which made an extraordinary impression on the mind of the Moslem woman. From that time he talked to her about the excellence of the Christian Religion.

This woman, who was surprised and enchanted with all she had heard, told her husband he had done very wrong in abandoning his religion, which, according to the explanations given by St Vincent, appeared to her to be the *best*; and therefore, she added, the God of the Christians does not deserve to be abandoned. Such a speech was not flattering for an apostate, for if a man is master of himself to abandon his religion he is not master enough to stifle the cries of conscience, and the sinner hears in the interior an importunate voice which speaks to him much louder than the sound which strikes his ear. The man was quite confused and answered nothing, but the next day he declared to St Vincent his firm intention of escaping with him. However, the hour of departure was not to strike for another ten months. Then the master and his slave embarked on a little boat, which was equally incapable both of resisting the fury of the waves as of defending itself against the pirates. If once they were discovered and pursued they could not escape death. In those days, the trial of two men, one of whom had induced the other to abjure Mohammedanism, would be quickly dispatched; they would both be impaled without any other formality. All these dangers did not impede our travellers; they confided their fate into God's Hands; they invoked Her whom the

Church calls "The Star of the Sea." Their hope was not deceived, and on June 28th they landed in France, and started for Avignon. There the renegade, after having given proofs of the most sincere conversion, was publicly reconciled by the Vice-Legate, Peter Montorio, who also received him in the Hospital of St John of God, which he had vowed to enter in order to do penance. He made a perpetual vow to serve the sick there. This conversion had been the work of the holy priest.

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On another occasion St Vincent was called to confess a peasant who was dangerously ill. This unfortunate man had his conscience laden with a great number of mortal sins, which a false shame had always prevented him from declaring in Confession; however, being encouraged by the sweetness with which this new Director treated him, he grew braver and confessed his secret faults, which he had never had the courage to declare to anybody. Being relieved of the enormous load which had weighed upon his mind for years, he cried out openly in transports of joy: "I should have been damned without that general Confession on account of the enormous sins which I had never dared to confess." He owed these sentiments to the Servant of God, and his death greatly edified all those who witnessed it.

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Amongst the conversions of all kinds which were

brought about by our Saint the most striking was that of a nobleman from Savoy. Having retired to France, he passed all his life at Court and, as usually happens in such cases, he had adopted its sentiments and maxims. Duelling was just at that time the most fashionable passion with persons of quality, and the means most likely to gain for them a false reputation for bravery, of which they were very jealous. Our military man therefore, who knew not how to pardon or pass over any offence, had the reputation of being one of the first duellists of his time. The homicides which he had committed amounted to an incredible figure. On the other hand, the reputation of St Vincent being rapidly spread abroad, he wanted to see with his own eyes a man of whom such wonderful things were told. The words of St Vincent were to him the two-edged sword spoken of in Holy Scripture; it penetrated into the secret of his soul, and this man, who had caused so many others to tremble, now began to tremble himself. His conscience was a horror to him, and in order to calm the remorse he felt, he placed himself under the direction of the Saint. His return to God was so sincere that St Vincent had some trouble in moderating his fervour. The whole province where he dwelt was astounded to see such a vindictive man, one so carried away by passion, and who knew no other law than the prejudice of that century, embracing in less than four days the strictest practice of a perfectly Christian life. He immediately sold some of his lands, and used the price of them for founding

monasteries and helping those who were in need. He would have sold the whole of his possessions if St Vincent had not prevented him for legitimate reasons. The rest of his life was absolutely exemplary, and in the end, some time before his death, he was clothed in the humble habit of St Francis. This dress appeared to him more precious than the insignia of all the high honours with which he had formerly been invested. Nobody doubted but that his death was precious in the sight of the Lord.

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The zeal of the holy priest was exercised not only with regard to his brethren, whom St Paul calls those of the household of faith (*domestici fidei*); it reached even those who were cut off from the Church because of their heresies. One of the first heretics whose conversion he undertook was a man called Régnier, with whom he had stayed for some time. He was a young man whose parents had bequeathed to him a considerable patrimony together with their vices; he had all he needed with which to pander to his vices, and he restrained himself in no way. St Vincent, after the example of Our Lord, Who sought out sinners and took greater care of the weak than of the strong, worked his way tactfully into the soul of this man; he made him understand how he was endangering his eternal salvation by his bad habits and his attachment to heresy. Little by little he separated him from the society of the libertines who besieged him, and at last he made clear to him in striking terms that, if debauchery agrees well with a Religion that makes

God the author of sin, it does not agree with the Religion of Jesus Christ. The sudden change which took place in his conduct inspired the heretical ministers with uneasiness; a rich man is precious to the sectarians, his hard cash is useful to the sect, and his name attracts recruits. Therefore all means were employed to retain as a Protestant a man who had become suspicious by the mere fact of his growing better; but reproaches and solicitations all were useless. Grace was doing its work, and the new proselyte, after having renounced his disorderly life, abjured heresy and passed the remainder of his days in works of Christian piety.

The conversion of Régnier was followed by many others, but none made more stir than that of the children of a certain Garone, because none met with more opposition. Their father was one of the most zealous partisans of the so-called Reformation; the conversion of Régnier, who was a relation of his, irritated him keenly, but when he saw the mist also clearing away from the eyes of his own children he no longer kept within bounds. He used all his paternal authority to overawe them; he threatened to disinherit them; he summoned St Vincent before the Court of Justice at Grenoble; he appealed to all his friends and all the Protestant Ministers. All was in vain, because there is no force nor power which can prevail against the designs of God. All his children were converted. The unhappy father died of grief, but his death only made the faith of his family more ardent than ever; his eldest son entered the Order of St Francis; his

daughter became a Religious ; the others remained in the world and gave great examples of charity and detachment, and especially of zeal for the Glory of God.

A little later our holy priest entered into discussion with three heretics. He explained to them the dogmas of Holy Church in all their simplicity. He listened patiently to their objections, and settled them with that precision which was the peculiar property of his mind ; and his mind, as shown in his letters and Conferences, absolutely compels admiration. At his sixth Conference two of his adversaries surrendered, and, happy in knowing the truth, were generous enough to embrace it and to make a public profession thereof. The third man became more obstinate in his resistance. In spite of a certain amount of ability, he was one of those men who are bent on collecting all that seems to favour their prejudices and will not condescend to listen to what might open their eyes. They are clever in multiplying objections, but they are short-sighted in distinguishing what is false even when it is put most clearly to them. In fact he was of that type which imagine that their own conduct is above all suspicion, purely because they manage to see whatever is defective in the conduct of others. Such was the man with whom St Vincent had to deal ; he thought himself clever and classed himself as a theologian, but morally he led an extremely loose life. Nevertheless he made the most of the bad conduct of certain Catholics, as if it were a proof in favour of his sect, and every day he re-

turned to the Conference with fresh objections. Here is one of them, which shows clearly how terrible the judgments of God will be upon bad priests, and with what justice, according to the words of Ezekiel, He will attribute to the indolence of pastors the loss of the sheep confided to their care.

"You pretend, sir, that the Church of Rome is guided by the Spirit of God," said the heretic to our Saint, "but that is precisely what I cannot believe; for on the one hand one sees the Catholics in the country abandoned to the care of vicious and ignorant pastors, who are not instructed in their duties, not knowing, most of them, the very meaning of the Christian Religion; and on the other hand, one sees towns full of priests and monks who have nothing to do, and nevertheless they leave these people in frightful ignorance, which is the cause of many being lost daily. And you would have me believe that such conduct is directed by the Holy Ghost? I will never believe it."

The Servant of God was troubled to see a heretic justifying himself by the conduct of those very men whose life should be so edifying as to attract the infidel and the pagan. It was for him a new light thrown on the needs of the country people, and on the necessity of coming to their aid. However, he must not leave unanswered an objection which had nothing solid at the bottom of it and would be equally conclusive against Protestants as against Catholics. St Vincent therefore, hiding the evil as well as he could, answered that there were still in many parishes good rectors and good

curates, and that amongst the ecclesiastics and Religious, whom one saw in great numbers in the towns, there were many who consecrated their time to ministering in the prisons and hospitals. Others went to preach and catechise in the country. Amongst those who did not leave their monasteries, some occupied themselves by praying to God and singing His praises day and night; others made themselves useful to the public by composing learned works, by teaching Christian Doctrine to the people, and by administering the Sacraments. He said that the number of priests with lax habits was exaggerated, and if it had to be admitted that a certain number did exist who employed their time badly and did not fulfil their duties, they were simply individuals, frail men, subject to error, members it is true of Holy Church, who includes in her flock the chaff as well as the good wheat. These men did not constitute the Church of Jesus Christ, but on the contrary they resisted the Holy Spirit, which governs Her. He finished by explaining to him what Catholics mean when they teach that the Church is directed by the Holy Spirit, and made him see how this direction concerns not only the whole Body of the Church, but also its head himself, who cannot err in his infallible decisions; so that the faithful cannot go astray or be lost if they walk by the light of Faith and live according to the rules of Christian Justice.

Such a peremptory reply should have satisfied him to whom it was addressed. Nevertheless he did not surrender, and still maintained that the

ignorance of the people and the lack of zeal amongst the priests was an infallible proof that the Roman Church was not directed by the Spirit of God. St Vincent, to cut short such objections, arranged for a Mission to be given. The news spread through the whole country; the heretic set himself to examine the exercises that were given with all the attention of a man of prejudice; he assisted at the sermons and catechetical instructions; he noticed the care that was taken to teach the ignorant those truths that are necessary for salvation; he admired the charity which adapted the teaching to the weakness of the most uncultured minds, to enable them to understand what they must believe and practise. Finally he witnessed the conversion of a great number of sinners. Being struck by all this, he said to the Saint: "Now I see that the Holy Spirit *does* direct the Roman Church, since, in this Church, care is taken of the instruction and salvation of poor peasants. I am ready to enter the Church whenever you will be pleased to receive me." St Vincent asked him if he had no longer any objections or doubts. "No," he replied, "I believe all that you have told me, and I am ready to renounce publicly all my errors." Our holy priest, in order to be quite certain that his decision was not a mere phase of enthusiasm, questioned him on many points, and especially those to which he had shown most aversion. The Saint was satisfied with his answers and recognized with joy that he had retained his instructions. The day was fixed for his abjuration. The bystanders were

numerous, because the ceremony had been announced to the people. Everyone thanked God for the return of this wandering sheep, and thrilled with joy to see him hastening to the Fold, but this joy was troubled by an unforeseen accident.

St Vincent having publicly asked this man if he persevered in the resolution of abjuring his errors, he answered that indeed he did persevere, but that one fresh difficulty had just cropped up, regarding a stone statue, the form of which left much to be desired and which was a representation of the Blessed Virgin; he said (pointing with his finger) that he could not make up his mind to believe that any virtue whatsoever was in that shapeless image. The Saint answered that the Church did not teach that any positive virtue was attached to material images; that God could very well operate through them, and did so sometimes, as in the case of the rod of Moses, which worked marvels, but that in themselves they had neither strength nor power. And he also added that this dogma of our Faith was so well known in the Church that even children were able to give a reason for it. The holy priest called up a child on the spot, from amongst the best instructed, and asked him what we should believe with regard to holy images. The child answered that it was good to have them and to render them honour, not on account of the material of which they are made, but because they represent Our Lord, His Glorious Mother, and the Saints who are reigning in Heaven; who, after having triumphed over the world, exhort us by these representations

of them to imitate their faith and their good example. St Vincent showed the correctness of this answer, and declared to the Protestant that the difficulty which had impeded him carried no weight. The latter then surrendered in good faith, abjured his errors in presence of a large crowd, and persevered in the Catholic Religion until his death. The beginning, the progress and the details of this conversion remained always deeply engraven in the memory of our Saint, because the care expended in instructing the country people had been the principal cause thereof.

PRACTICE.—*All those who have the care of souls must watch that they be instructed in the truths of Faith. If they remark any negligence on this point, let them be armed with a holy zeal to drive away all ignorance on the truths of Faith, and they will see that the disorders of sin will disappear in the same proportion.*

EIGHTH DAY

MEEKNESS OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL

THIS virtue, which is helpful in captivating hearts, cost St Vincent more perhaps than any other. Born with a fiery temperament and a tendency to hastiness, he was naturally inclined to anger; he took trouble in the very beginning to express the first movements, but the interior violence he had to use was betrayed by a somewhat gloomy and unpleasing manner. He therefore made a study of his own character; he saw what was wanting; he had recourse to the Lord, the only One capable, by His Grace, of reforming nature. He derived courage from the example of St Francis de Sales, whose extraordinary meekness struck him from the time of their first interview. At length, by stress of violence, he became so meek and so affable that on this point he would have been the most prominent example of his century, if that century had not already possessed the holy Bishop of Geneva.

"In looking at Mr. Vincent," said Mr. Tronson, "one could believe one saw St Paul imploring the Corinthians with the meekness and kindness of Jesus Christ."

It costs us very little to practise meekness towards

those who are meek towards us ; even the heathen practise it in such cases, but to practise it towards those who offend us, who contradict us and will listen to nothing, that means heroic virtue, as in the case of St Vincent de Paul. It often happened that on the same day he had business with persons of very high rank and with ignorant, coarse people, with people of intelligence and with rustics, with the scrupulous and with proud philosophers—in a word, with every imaginable kind of person, from the King on his throne to the shepherd in his hut. With them all he made use of those refined manners inspired by the Gospel, and which consisted in making himself all to all, to gain all to Jesus Christ, by reproducing everywhere the image of Our Lord living amongst men.

Never could one notice the slightest contraction of his features, the least bitterness in his tone, the least indication of weariness in his whole exterior. He could be seen interrupting his conversations with persons of high rank to repeat the same thing, as often as five times, to those who could not understand, and saying it as calmly the last time as the first. He listened without a shadow of impatience to poor people who knew not how to express themselves, and listened for a very long time. He allowed himself to be interrupted many times in one day by scrupulous persons, ever repeating the same thing in different words ; he listened to the very end with unalterable patience, even writing to them sometimes with his own hand what he had already told them, and adding fresh explanations,

if they did not understand clearly. He interrupted his breviary and his sleep in order to miss no occasion of making a sacrifice, which meant very much to a man who was absorbed by so many and such various occupations. It was specially in dealing with heretics that meekness seemed to him to be so necessary. "When we have a dispute with anyone," he said, "it frequently happens that the arguments we use often make our opponent realize that we want to have the upper hand, and that is why he prepares himself for resistance rather than for recognition of the truth; so that often enough the debate, instead of enlightening his mind, finishes by closing up the door of his heart, whereas meekness and affability would open it."

He quoted the example of St Francis de Sales as an evident proof of this truth, since that Bishop, he said, although most skilled in controversy, had gained more heretics over by his meekness than by his knowledge. On this heading Cardinal Du Perron said that he himself was able to convince heretics, but to convert them the Bishop of Geneva was the only one capable. "In fact," said St Vincent, "I have never seen nor heard tell of any heretic being converted by the force of debate nor the subtlety of argument, but by meekness, for so powerful is this virtue in gaining souls to God."

The Servant of God was equally convinced that by meekness alone was it possible to draw fruit from the country Missions. "Make yourselves affable to the poor," he said, "that is the counsel of Holy Scripture" ("*Congregationi pauperum affa-*

bilem te facito"). "Such must be our rule," he said to his brethren, "otherwise they feel repulsed and dare not approach us, thinking we are too severe or too high up for them, and thus the work of God will perish, and we could not carry out the designs He has upon us. If God gave blessings to our first Missions it was remarked that this was because we had acted humbly and simply with all kinds of persons; and if it has pleased God to make use of the most inefficient for the conversion of heretics, they themselves owned that it was patience and cordiality which had won them over. Even the slaves with whom I have lived are not gained in any other way; if I ever happened to speak to them dryly I spoiled everything; and on the contrary, when I praised them for their resignation, when I pitied them in their sufferings, when I told them they were happy to be doing their Purgatory in this world, when I kissed their chains . . . it was then they listened to me, that they gave Glory to God and put themselves in a state of salvation. I beg you, sir, to help me to give thanks to God for this, and to ask Him that it may please Him to grant that all the Missioners may treat their neighbour sweetly, charitably and humbly, both in public and in private; and even sinners and hardened souls, without ever making use of invectives or reproaches or hard words against anyone."

The Saint's meekness was founded on this double principle: "*The Words and Example of Our Saviour; the Knowledge of Human Weakness.*" With regard to

the former, he said that meekness and humility are two sisters that agree very well together; that Jesus Christ has taught us not to separate them when He says, " Learn of Me, for I am Meek and Humble of Heart " (" *Discite a Me quia mitis sum et humilis corde* "). And He supported these words by His Example. Thus He willed that His disciples should be humble and subject to many failings . . . to teach those who are in exalted positions how to treat those under their direction. " One could not," he added, " see the Meekness of Our Lord in His Passion without being attracted to this virtue; for example, when He gave the name of ' friend ' to the traitor Judas; when he bore, without the least complaint, the cruelty of the soldiers, who spat in His Face or insulted Him in His Sufferings. Oh! Jesus, my God! " he exclaimed, " what an example for us who have resolved to imitate Thee! And what a humiliation for those who will not bear anything, or get impatient and bitter when they have something to suffer! "

As to the second principle, St Vincent said that it is in the nature of man to fall, just as the nature of brambles is to have prickles; . . . that the just man falls seven times—that is to say, *many* times a day; that the mind of man has its bad times and sicknesses, like the body; that man often needs great patience to put up with himself, and that consequently it is not strange he should exercise patience towards others; for, as St Gregory has remarked, true justice knows compassion, but not anger nor rage. Hence he concluded that meek-

ness was necessary in all circumstances of life. "Words which wound us," he continued, "are far oftener sallies of nature than from bad dispositions of the heart; the wisest people are not exempt from passions, and these passions cause them sometimes to give way to expressions which they regret a moment later. In whatever place we are we must suffer, but since we are able to merit at the same time, it is very useful to have a provision of meekness stored up, for without this virtue we suffer without any merit, and not without danger to our salvation.

"There are many acts of meekness," added the Saint, "which may be reduced to three principal ones. The *first* of these acts represses movements of anger; the outbreaks of that fire which troubles the soul and makes it change colour. A meek man does not cease to feel the first movement of passion because the movements of nature anticipate those of grace, but he remains firm that he may not be carried away, and if in spite of himself something appears exteriorly, he quickly pulls himself together and returns to his natural state. If he is obliged to reprove or correct, he is led by duty, and not by passion. In this he imitates the Son of God, Who called St Peter 'Satan'; Who on the same occasion spoke of the Jews as 'hypocrites,' ten or twelve times; who overthrew the tables of the money-changers; Who did all this with perfect calmness, whereas a man devoid of meekness would have done it in anger."

According to St Vincent the *second* act of meek-

ness consists in great affability, and that serenity of expression which puts all those at their ease who approach us. " Hence it is that some people, who have a smiling and pleasant manner, please everybody, God having given them this grace by which they seem to offer their heart to you and to ask for yours. There are others, like myself, who are rough and have an oppressed, sad, surly appearance, which frightens and even disconcerts people. The Missioners, who by their vocation have to exercise their ministry amongst the country people, amongst candidates for Ordination and those making spiritual Retreats, will be wise to adopt these insinuating manners, which captivate hearts. Otherwise they will obtain no fruit and will be like barren soil, which produces nothing but thistles."

Finally, the *third* act of meekness, according to St Vincent, consists in driving from our mind those reflections which present themselves after we have experienced some trouble, or had some ill service rendered us. We must then accustom ourselves to turn our mind away from the so-called grievance and excuse the author, and say to ourselves : " He did it through hastiness ; he was carried away by the first impulse." Above all, we must be on our guard against opening our lips to answer those who are only seeking an occasion to be irritated. Meekness not only makes us excuse the affronts and injustices we receive, but it will also make us treat with affability those who are guilty of them, and if they should go so far as to give us a blow we should suffer it for God's sake.

"We must also repress outbursts of anger and prefer the language of meekness to any other, for sometimes only one sweet word suffices to convert a hardened soul; and, on the contrary, one rough word may cause the loss of a soul. Only three times in my life have I made use of rough words when reproving or correcting others, thinking that I had a right to act in that manner, and I always repented of it, because I failed miserably; and, on the contrary, I have always obtained what I desired through meekness."

Meekness, which always charms, had in this holy man something indescribably candid, spiritual and delicate, so that one could not resist him. One day he was conversing with several persons of high rank; one of them, amongst other imprecations, told him "to go to the devil." At these words the Saint smiled and drew him gently into his arms, saying: "Well, sir, I place you *in God's Hands*, because it would be a great pity that the devil should take hold of you." These few words edified the company, and so greatly touched him to whom they were addressed that he promised to abstain henceforth from such expressions.

The meekness of the Saint never lessened that stability and vigour which a man like himself could not dispense with. "There are no persons," he said, "more constant and courageous in all that is good than the meek and compliant; whilst, on the contrary, those who allow themselves to be carried away by anger and irascible passions are usually very inconstant. The former resemble those

rivers which flow noiselessly, tranquilly, and are never dried up; the latter resemble torrents that have no force or impetuosity except in time of floods. . . . These men act only in fits and starts, and therefore very clumsily. What must we do, then, to succeed in the things of God? We must always imitate in our conduct the Wisdom of God, and attain our ends mightily, as He Himself does, but by ways full of sweetness and meekness: '*Attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter.*' "

St Vincent united strength with meekness, and sought no other support but virtue, no other diplomacy but his faith; he upheld, even at Court, the rights of truth, and never promised what his conscience would not permit him to carry out. He was insensible to the most pressing solicitations; friendship or gratitude never made him compromise; never in his whole life did he on any occasion say yes when duty obliged him to say no. We could quote many proofs on this point. Mgr. Fénélon speaks for all; this Bishop declares, in his letter to Clement XI, that "discerning of spirits and resolute courage were gifts which shone in the man of God to such a degree that was almost incredible; in giving advice he made no account of the discontent or anger of the great, but solely of the interests of Holy Church."

Many other facts show us equally clearly that St Vincent de Paul had no fear on earth, except the fear of God. We read of him that, laying aside all rules of human prudence, he went in search of a

father, not to congratulate him on the nomination of his son to a Bishopric, but to conjure him *not* to permit this son to accept a dignity of which he was not worthy. We read that he refused, for reasons of his own, a nobleman, as well as a princess, permission to visit a convent of which he was Superior. We read also that he took upon himself all the odium of these refusals, thus exposing himself to much resentment.

Other similar facts show us that St Vincent must have been, like the ancient prophets, a "wall of brass," offering solid resistance, without, however, deviating in the least from the path of obedience.

PRACTICE.—*Let fathers and mothers and other superiors learn how to repress those transports of anger which are apt to master them; let them rather show affability and meekness towards those who are confided to them, especially when it is question of giving advice on matters of religion; and they will see that their observations and advice will have much better effect.*

NINTH DAY

SPECIAL DEVOTIONS OF ST VINCENT

ST VINCENT had a very high appreciation of the Infinite Majesty of God. His attitude of deep lowliness was manifested by the way in which he fulfilled all his religious exercises; by his words, always full of respect, when he was speaking of God, and by the ardent zeal with which he strove to communicate his own sentiments to others.

Although he usually went to bed very late he rose regularly at four o'clock, and did it with such holy eagerness that the second stroke of the bell never found him in the same position as the first. He began his day by offering to God his thoughts, words and actions, in union with those of Jesus Christ. Then he made his meditation and afterwards recited aloud the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus. Then he either went to Confession, (which happened frequently because, as one of his Directors testifies, he could not endure even the faintest trace of sin in his soul) or to make his preparation for Holy Mass. We can affirm, that in saying Mass he can well serve as a model for the most scrupulously reverential priests. He pronounced every word so distinctly and with such

loving stress that one saw clearly the perfect harmony between his heart and his lips. His modesty and his tone of voice in pronouncing those words of the Mass which remind the priest both of his faults and of his dignity; the serenity of his face when he turned towards the people to give them the peace and blessing of the Lord; in one word, his whole exterior was such as to make an impression on those even who seemed least capable of receiving it; one felt as if one saw an Angel at the Altar.

He celebrated Mass every day with the exception of the three first days of his annual Retreat, as was the custom in the Community; and so long as he could manage it, he never failed to do so, even on a journey. His ordinary indispositions did not hinder him from ascending the Altar, even in that state of fever from which he suffered almost without intermission.

Through love for the Lamb, immolated for the Redemption of men, he often heard or even served another Mass after having said his own. One saw this venerable old man, more than seventy-five years old, at a time when he could only walk with difficulty, consider it a privilege to serve as an acolyte. "It is a shame," he said, "for an ecclesiastic, who has been consecrated for service at the Altar, to allow those who have no such charge to fulfil this office in his presence."

His piety was not less admirable during the solemn Offices. To hear him singing and chanting in the Choir one would have taken him for a

Seraphim rather than a man. He wished the singing to be slow, with eyes fixed on the book, without looking right or left.

Although each one of the Mysteries of our Holy Faith was to him an object of tender devotion, he honoured with a special predilection those of the *Holy Trinity* and of the *Incarnation*, the sources of all the rest. One would need to be imbued with his piety to be able to give some idea of what he practised towards the Sacrament of the Love of a God Who wills to remain with His own, even until the consummation of the world.

When he entered the Sanctuary, hallowed by the Presence of Jesus Christ, he usually remained bowed down on his knees in such a humble posture that one would have thought he would willingly abase himself to the very centre of the earth, to show his respect more openly. Watching his deep recollection would make one believe and declare that the Saint really saw in vision Jesus Christ Himself. He avoided talking in churches, and if anybody wanted to say a word to him, even were he a Bishop or a Prince, he found a way of leading him outside the door, and he did it with such good grace that nobody could take offence.

If he were going out into the town he went first to salute the Master of the house (so he expressed it); on returning he went again to salute Him; and he introduced this practice into the Community. A man so full of love for the Adorable Sacrament was extremely sensitive to the outrages inflicted to It at this time by heretics and licentious soldiers.

He tried to make good these sacrilegious outrages by voluntary penance, bitter tears, mortifications, generous gifts to several desecrated churches.

He could not bear to see one of his own Religious genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament in a thoughtless way, and he said that those who made only half a genuflection were " like marionettes, that perform light movements and curtsies without soul or spirit." We must not think that on this point he was mixing up true devotion with mere exterior signs ; but he had the intimate conviction that, wherever there is genuine devotion, there too, these exterior signs would exist.

We must not separate St Vincent's tender devotion to God the Son from that which he had for His Blessed Mother. In order to celebrate worthily the Feasts of the Queen of Heaven he fasted on the eves together with all the members of his household. On the Feast itself he officiated solemnly, and put before his Sons the examples of virtue indicated by the Mystery of the day.

In whatever place he happened to be, even should he be speaking with a prince, the moment he heard the Angelus bell ringing he knelt down (except in Pascal time or on Sunday) and recited it reverently. After the example of St Bernard, he often invoked the " Star of the Sea " in the midst of those tempests which so often trouble our existence. " Each of our days," he said, " bears the signs of the protection of Her who is pleased to be our Mother if we are willing to be Her children."

To convince oneself that St Vincent was a zealous

Servant of Mary it is sufficient to remark that he did all in his power to extend and make devotion to Her more attractive. He wished that his Religious should honour Her every day of their life; that they should imitate Her virtues as far as possible; that they should cause Her to be honoured by all those to whom they had an opportunity of making known Her greatness, Her power with God and Her tenderness towards sinners. On all the Missions given by himself or by his priests, he wished always that the faithful should be taught what gratitude and love they owe to that sublime Creature, who indeed is infinitely below God but inferior to none other but Him. And among the many associations and reunions that he instituted there was not a single one he did not place under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin.

The devotion of St Vincent for the Mother of God and the other Saints drew its source from the same principle: the "desire of glorifying God in the person of those whom He Himself willed to glorify." He honoured especially the Apostles, who had the happiness of seeing and touching with their hands the Word of God made Flesh, and who sealed with their blood the words of Eternal Life which they preached.

He always had vividly in his mind the presence of his Guardian Angel, to whom he addressed some prayers each day. He also bequeathed this practice to his Religious, and when they knelt down on entering or leaving their room, they were recommended to have as their secondary intention the

honouring of the Angel to whom God had given the charge of watching over them.

His affection for St Joseph resembled much that of St Teresa for this worthy Spouse of the Mother of God; he made him Patron of his Intern Seminaries. He congratulated the Superior of Genoa because he had recourse to the mediation of this great Patriarch to procure capable workers for cultivating the vineyard of the Lord. Besides this, he expressed the desire that on his apostolic journeys he should inspire the people with great confidence in this "*Faithful Guardian of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus*." These are his own words.

We must not forget to mention here the rule he had made for himself of helping the souls in Purgatory by his prayers, and especially by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He often exhorted his priests to fulfil this duty of Christian piety. "These dear deceased," he said, "are the living members of Jesus Christ; they are animated with the life of His Grace, and assured of sharing one day in His Glory; for these reasons we are obliged to love them, to serve them and assist them with all our power." Still less did St Vincent forget the Benefactors of his Congregation; he made a rule that the De Profundis should be recited three times every day for their intention; that is to say, two at the Particular Examen before meals, and the other at the General Examen in the evening. It is splendid thus to see a Community not sitting down to take their repasts before having prayed for those who have done them good.

PRACTICE.—*If we wish to acquire a true spirit of devotion we must show great respect and veneration for everything connected with religion, being well on our guard never to speak of these things in a tone of pleasantry, or in any other way which might diminish our esteem for them.*

TENTH DAY

EVENNESS OF MIND OF ST VINCENT

THAT state of subjection of body and mind in virtue of which a man remains always at peace, always the same, whatever happens, is "not so much a special virtue," says St Vincent, "as it is a state which presupposes in him the combination of all virtues. It is a ray, a reflection on the exterior, of the peace and beauty within." A Christian who by force of violence, of mortifying himself, of uniting his will with the Will of God, has reached this point is henceforth master of himself, and remains calm and tranquil through all the vicissitudes of life. Whatever one may say of him or do to him, nothing causes any upheaval in his soul, whether he be crushed by the weight of affairs, whether he receives from the Hand of God the most unexpected blows, whether he be forgotten, despised, betrayed by those whom he loved or overwhelmed with kindness, his heart is always the same, his brow just as serene, his words always moderate; even his voice never changes tone and, on this point, already resembles the voice of the elect in that blessed Abode where there is no alteration nor change.

This is the portrait of our Saint. From his tenderest years to his extreme old age his piety, devotion and charity never diminished. In him one never saw those suspensions of virtue, those eclipses of fervour, which one so often meets with in other men; he walked on always with a regular step in the path of perfection, drawing with him all those who opposed his path. After considering this evenness of mind in general, we must mention what an example we have of it in the execution of such a great number of holy works for the good of the Church and the State. Without truce or relaxation, he had to occupy himself about the service of the poor, the instruction of the people and the means of sanctifying the clergy. He never left off a good work when there was question of beginning a better one, but he continued them both until he had brought them to completion. Contradictions, accidents and persecutions fortified his courage instead of shaking it. He wished always for what he thought God desired of him, and he desired it with that peace which great souls alone possess.

His balance of mind accompanied him in all the various functions he had to carry out. Honours never changed his manners nor his exterior conduct. The splendours of the Court, which dazzle so many others, made no impression upon him. Courtiers, prelates, ecclesiastics and other personages, who were inspired with sentiments of esteem, rendered him great honour; as to him, he received them with profound humility and great meekness. A Bishop, finding him always humble and as ready

to render service to those who needed him, as he had been previously to being summoned to the Court, described him by these two words, which contain much meaning: "Mr. Vincent is always Mr. Vincent."

But nothing shows his equality of mind better than the adversities he had to bear. These perils, so disastrous to many, only made his virtue shine all the brighter.

In the space of ten or twelve years he sustained more losses than usually happen during a whole century. Many of his Houses had no other revenues than what came absolutely by chance, and these revenues failed sometimes from four to eight months, or even for a whole year. Then he would hear that one of his farms had been pillaged; finally, sometimes death would reap seven or eight of his evangelical workers quite suddenly, and that in a country where it was difficult, or even impossible, to find anyone to replace them.

In the midst of all these adversities, which, following closely on each other, usually upset one's equilibrium, he was heard repeating these words: "God be praised! we must submit to His Will and accept all that it pleases Him to send us!"

A few remarkable facts showing his equality of soul have been recorded for us. One day, about two steps distant from his house, he received a blow from a man whom he had accidentally knocked against in passing. The Saint, throwing himself at the feet of him who had treated him so outrageously, presented to him the other cheek, asking

his pardon. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who had witnessed the insult, and who respected St Vincent as a father, assembled in a crowd round him. If he had only given a sign the unjust aggressor would have been thrown into prison : the man, of his own accord, either because the cries of the crowd had terrified him, or because the humility of the holy priest had made him realize all the vileness of his act, threw himself at the feet of St Vincent and asked his pardon.

A gentleman, having gone to beg a benefice for his son, could not obtain the support he asked for. On withdrawing he treated St Vincent in an insolent manner, on the threshold, in presence of many others. " You are right, sir," said the holy man. casting himself at his feet, " I am only a miserable man, and a sinner." The former, surprised at this unexpected behaviour, made one bound into his carriage. The Saint got up, ran to the carriage and saluted him. How much it must cost nature to act in such a manner ! What virtue must be needed to conceive such a design ! What equality of mind to execute it ! But what quarrels, what discords we should avoid if we possessed such courage !

PRACTICE.—*He who does not take the trouble to acquire this balance, this evenness of mind, will never have the Spirit of the Lord with him :* " Non in commotione Dominus " (" *The Lord does not dwell in agitation and trouble* ").

ELEVENTH DAY

HUMILITY OF ST VINCENT

FEW saints have carried humility so far as St Vincent did. According to a virtuous ecclesiastic, there never was on this earth any ambitious man who was so frantic in seeking esteem, elevation and glory as St Vincent was ardent in seeking abjection, contempt and everything imaginable most likely to confuse and humble him.

To appreciate the faithfulness of this portrait it is enough to remind ourselves that St Vincent always regarded himself as unfit to labour for the things of God. He looked upon the honours rendered him as so many wounds with which God strikes His enemies. Also, far from justifying himself when he was accused, he at once put himself on the side of his accusers. He even cleverly made himself out to be guilty when in reality he was absolutely innocent. He was more rigorous in condemning his slightest faults than others are in condemning their most serious disorders.

The Son of God, although He was always " the Splendour of the Glory of His Father, and the Image of His Substance," willed nevertheless to be regarded as the " disgrace of men and the out-

cast of the people." Such were the sentiments, however hard to nature, which St Vincent conceived and maintained within himself, and (what is truly an astounding fact) in face of all the good he did and the praise he received he never lost sight of them. On arriving in Paris he called himself only "Vincent" (his baptismal name), without adding "de Paul," for fear of being looked upon as a person of quality. At Court, where birth is generally preferred to merit, he published that he was the son of a poor peasant.

To these facts, which are sufficient to make him known, let us add that St Vincent preferred ordinary merit to striking merit; that his invariable rule was never to make himself known except on the weakest side; as also, between two thoughts, always to choose the more ordinary one and the one least likely to exalt him. Hence, said Cardinal de La Rouchefoucauld, "it is not difficult to recognize that to find true humility exemplified on this earth we should seek it in St Vincent de Paul."

In fact, no occasion of humbling himself ever presented itself but he received it with delight, or, rather, went in search of it if it did not come to him spontaneously. One day, when he was accompanying an ecclesiastic to the door of St Lazare, a poor woman, thinking she would give her request a better chance, said to him: "Your Grace, give me an alms!" "Oh, my poor woman," he answered, "you little know me, for I am only the son of a poor villager." Another time, with the same intention, a woman told him that she had

been a servant to Madame his mother. "You are mistaken, my good woman," he answered, "my mother never had a servant, having been one herself; she was the wife, and I the son, of a peasant."

His birth was not his only resource in order to lay himself open to contempt; as regards mind and heart he concealed his gifts so well that he gave quite a wrong impression of himself. He wrote to the Superioress of a Visitation Convent in Warsaw: "For over thirty years I have had the honour of serving your Houses in Paris, but alas! I am none the better for that; I, who ought to have made great progress in virtue at the sight of these incomparably holy souls . . . I beg you very humbly to help me to ask God's pardon for the bad use I have made of all His Graces."

He made answer to some person who had earnestly begged his prayers: "I will offer them to God, since you ask me, but I need the help of good souls more than anybody else in the world on account of the great miseries which overwhelm my soul, and which make me regard the opinion people have of me as a punishment for my hypocrisy, which causes me to pass for what I really am not. Alas! I am incapable of any good, and only capable of all evil."

One of his priests had written to tell him that the Superior sent by him to one of his Houses was somewhat wanting in the good manners requisite for the post he occupied. St Vincent first made a great eulogy of this Superior, whose solid virtue

was worth far more than the refined politeness of many others; and then he did not let the occasion pass of criticizing himself: "And I! What am I made of? And how is it that I have been put up with until now in my employment? I am the most rustic, the most ridiculous and most stupid; when amongst people of quality I cannot exchange half a dozen words without showing that I have neither mind nor judgment; and, what is worse, I possess no virtue approaching that of the Superior in question."

St Vincent spoke of his Congregation as a body, in the same way as he spoke of himself. All Communities appeared to him holy and worthy of respect; according to him, his own was the only one not worthy to be named. A Missioner, having published of his own accord a pamphlet on "The Institute, its progress, and its works," sent it to St Vincent. St Vincent groaned over it. He wrote to him: "There has been a short History of our Institute printed somewhere by you. I feel such grief about it that I cannot find words to express it to you, because it is so opposed to humility to publish forth what we are, and what we are doing. If there is any good in us, and in our way of living, it comes from God, and it is for Him to make it manifest, if He judges it expedient. But as for us, who are poor ignorant men, and sinners, we must hide ourselves as useless for any good, and as unworthy of consideration. For this reason, sir, God has given me the grace to remain firm up to now in never consenting to let anything be printed

which might make the Company known and esteemed, although I have been greatly pressed to do so, especially on account of some stories brought from Madagascar, from Barbary, and from the Hebrides. Still less would I have permitted the printing of anything regarding the essence and the spirit, the birth and the progress, the functions, and the end of our Institute. But since there is no longer any remedy, we will leave it there. I only beg you in future not to do anything regarding the Company without warning me beforehand."

If charity had permitted him, St Vincent would have congratulated anyone who would disparage the Congregation rather than those who would seek to honour it. A magistrate, who was deceived by false reports, said one day at a public meeting that the priests of St Lazare were giving very few Missions, and as a fact at that particular time they were giving many. The Saint was content to justify himself by act, and would not demand any explanations or apologies.

He went perhaps even further when some influential people, in order to revenge themselves for the refusal of a Bishopric, invented such a specious calumny against him that it reached the ears of the Queen. This wise Princess asked him, smiling, if he knew that such a thing was being said about him. At the risk of being thought guilty, the Servant of God contented himself with answering that he was a great sinner. Her Majesty having represented to him that he ought to justify himself, he said : " Many other things of that kind

were said against Our Lord, and He did not justify Himself. I am happy to be treated like the Son of God: humiliations are the greatest graces which the Lord can grant to men. Praises should make us lament, since it is written: 'Woe to you when men shall praise you' ('*Vae cum benedixerint vobis homines*')."

Certainly he took care to inspire his priests with the love of all virtues, but it was of humility above all he strove to enhance the importance. "Truly, if each one of us will make a study of himself, he will find that it is very just, and very reasonable, to despise oneself; for if, on the one hand, we seriously consider the corruption of our nature, the lightness of our mind, the darkness of our understanding, the unruliness of our will, and the impurity of our affections; and if, on the other hand, we weigh carefully in the balance of holiness our various works and productions, we shall find that all are most worthy of contempt." He added that "in the holiest deed of a preacher of the Gospel one is sure to find something to cover him with confusion; he will find that for the most part he either behaved badly in the way he performed them, or often enough in the intention; and in fact, if he does not wish to flatter himself, he will recognize himself as the worst of men."

To these motives, which he put forward on many occasions, the Man of God added others also, drawn from the example of great men, ancient and modern. Thus St Paul published through the whole world that he had had the misfortune to

blaspheme God and to persecute the Church, St Augustine made known to all the secret sins of his youth. St Vincent added that those whom God spared from such shameful falls were not therefore less humble. "Thus," he said again, "St Francis de Sales talked of the world like a man who despises all its vanities. Cardinal de Bérulle was accustomed to say that it was a great advantage to remain in a humble condition. The most abject conditions," he continued, "are the safest; there is some sort of malignant influence about elevated states. For that reason the Saints always avoided dignities, and Our Lord, speaking of Himself, says that He had come into this world to serve, and not to be served." St Vincent said, conformably to the teachings of Jesus Christ, that "he who exalted himself shall be humbled; that the life of the Son of God was one continual humiliation; that He loved it until the end; and that, after His Death, He willed to be represented in His Church as a criminal, fastened to a cross, to teach all generations that the vice opposed to humility is one of the greatest evils that could be conceived, that it greatly aggravates our sins and, by insinuating its poison into the best and holiest actions, it renders them evil."

He found a clear proof of the latter truth in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Gospel. "Yes," he continued, "even should we be rascals, if we had recourse to humility it would put us on the right path, whilst, on the contrary, though we might be like angels . . . if nevertheless

we are devoid of humility, our virtue would be without foundation and could not stand. . . . Let us therefore bear this truth in mind, Gentlemen, and let each one of us engrave it deeply in his heart: *that whatever virtue he thinks he possesses, if he has not humility, he is nothing but a proud Pharisee and an abominable Missioner.*" "O Lord Jesus Christ, infuse into our minds those divine lights which made Thee prefer contumely to praise; enkindle in our hearts those holy affections which burnt and consumed Thee, and which made Thee seek the Glory of Thy Heavenly Father in Thy very shame! Grant by Thy Grace that we may begin at once to reject all that does not conduce to Thy Honour, and to our own contempt. . . . Grant that we may renounce once and for all the applause of deluded or deceitful men, and all vain imaginations about successes in our work! . . ."

PRACTICE.—*Satan, because of his pride, was driven out of Heaven, and condemned to the eternal pains of hell. O my God, help me to be humble, even so far as to suffer willingly all injuries and fill the offices that are lowest in the eyes of the world, in order to please God and render myself worthy of His Mercy.*

TWELFTH DAY

FAITH OF ST VINCENT

FAITH is the basis of Christian virtue, the foundation of the edifice of our salvation; it is the food with which the just man is nourished upon earth ("*Justus ex fide vivit*"), says the Lord. St Vincent feared the very shadow of anything which might injure his faith. He knew that the simpler it is the more agreeable it is to God; he did not found it upon human reasoning or philosophical subtleties, but upon the authority of the Church. "Thus," he said, "the more one fixes one's eyes on the sun, the less one sees it; in the same way, the more one tries to reason about the truths of our religion, the less one knows them by faith. It is sufficient that the Church proposes them to us; that alone can secure us from failing in our belief, and in our submission. . . . The Church is the Kingdom of God, Who inspires those whom He has appointed to govern Her with everything that She needs for Her permanent welfare." These dispositions inspired the Servant of God with a just aversion for those restless and curious minds who delight in subtle arguments about our

Mysteries, and seem to want to understand them to the very depth.

The high idea which he had of faith inclined him to communicate it as much as he possibly could to those who lacked it most. . . . Hence the frequent catechetical instructions to the people, which are usually so much neglected; hence his care to share his sentiments with those among his friends whom he found most capable of fulfilling this charitable duty; hence the establishment of his Congregation, that is to say, of a body of Evangelical workers destined to plant and to cultivate the germ of faith in the most barren lands; hence the holy joy which he felt in publishing the good done by other societies which a jealous eye would have looked upon as rivals. "Some priests from Normandy," he said, "led by Father Eudes, have come to give a Mission in Paris, with wonderful success; the crowds who made the exercises were enormous. . . . We took no part in it because our work is with poor country folk, but we have the consolation of seeing that our little efforts have stirred others to apply themselves to the same work, and with better results." What faith! what humility! Let us rather say what faith and humility combined! because when faith is ardent, as in the case of St Vincent, it is never found without profound humility.

If the Saint possessed purity of faith, he possessed also its fullness; he lived by it, as the just man does; it animated his thoughts and affections, his words and his actions. Everything in him was regulated

by faith when making up his mind, or planning out a project, or carrying out some undertaking. What most men do through natural impulse, or through human calculations, St Vincent did through supernatural motives, and according to the rules of faith. Any plan conceived according to the rules of wise policy could not please him if it did not rest on the maxims of the Gospel, or could not be referred to a supernatural end. . . . It was his conviction that if the things done for God did not always succeed well, or not at all, it was because those who are feverishly trying to carry them out depend too much on human reason. "No, no," he said one day, "eternal truths alone are capable of filling the heart and of conducting us safely. Believe me, we need only rest firmly and solidly on some one of the Perfections of God, such as on His Goodness, His Providence, His Immensity, etc. . . . I say we need only establish ourselves well on these Divine foundations to become perfect in a short time. I do not mean that it is not also good to convince ourselves by strong and pregnant reasons, which may always be useful, but with subordination to the Truths of Faith. Experience teaches us that those preachers who preach by the Light of Faith do more good to souls than those who fill their discourses with human arguments and philosophical reasons; because the Lights of Faith are always accompanied by a certain heavenly unction which insinuates itself secretly into the minds of the audience; and from this we may judge whether it is not necessary, for the sake of our own perfection,

as well as to procure the salvation of souls, to accustom ourselves to follow the Lights of Faith always and in everything."

The Man of God advanced so faithfully by the shining of these holy Lights that they were to him, as to the Prophet King, the torch which guided all his steps: "*Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis.*" By means of this Light, which shines in the darkest places, he could discern in sensible objects what the eyes of the body could not perceive. He used to say: "I must not judge a poor peasant, or a poor woman, by the exterior, nor according to the apparent ability of their minds, seeing that often they have scarcely the face or mind of rational beings, they are so coarse and earthly; but turn over the medal and you will see, by the Light of Faith, that the Son of God, Who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people; that He had scarcely the appearance of a man in His Passion, and that He passed for a fool in the minds of the Gentiles, and for a rock of scandal in that of the Jews; and with all this He styles Himself the 'Evangelist of the poor' ('*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*'). Oh, God! how beautiful it is to look at the poor, if we consider them in God and in the esteem which Jesus Christ has for them, but if we look at them according to the sentiments of the flesh and the spirit of the world they will appear contemptible."

To have a clearer and more complete idea of the liveliness of his faith let us cast a look at his other virtues; the excellence and the multiplicity of their

fruits will make us realize the strength and vigour of root which produced them.

PRACTICE.—*Faith without works is useless; let us perform the works of faith. To perform the works of faith is to believe that there is a God, Whom we must serve with all the strength of our soul and of our mind; it is to believe also that there is a hell, and therefore we have to keep far from mortal sin, which alone can precipitate us into hell; finally, to believe that there is a Paradise, and consequently to practise virtue that we may one day arrive at its possession.*

THIRTEENTH DAY

MAXIMS OF ST VINCENT

THE thought of death is most efficacious in making us avoid evil and encourage ourselves in all that is good. The holy priest St Vincent used it as a spur to virtue. However, he did not wish it to take possession of a soul to such a degree as to endanger Christian confidence. "The thought of death is good," he said to a person who was afraid of it, "and Our Lord advised and recommended it, but it must be moderated; it is not expedient that you should have it constantly present to your mind; it is sufficient that you should think of it two or three times a day, without, however, stopping long upon it; and even if you should find yourself anxious about it, do not think of it at all." "The human mind," he said, when speaking of errors, "is quick and restless; the most ardent and most brilliant characters are not always the best, unless they are at the same time the most circumspect. He walks safely who does not stray from the path trodden by the majority of wise men." The Saint was an enemy of precipitation, and he often repeated that hastiness in decisions leads to the most false steps; but when he had come to a

decision he was as prompt in executing it as he had been slow in examining it. Thus, whether the result of the matter was favourable or not, he was calm, depending on the teaching of the Fathers: "*That the wise man must not judge things according to the success which attends them, but according to the intention which conceived them, and the proportion observed between the means and the end; that a well-planned affair may not have a happy result, whilst another, ventured on lightly, may turn out well.*"

The doctrine of the Gospel was the sole rule of his life. "To speak of the doctrine of Jesus Christ," he repeated, "is like speaking of an *immovable rock*. The Eternal Truths are infallibly accomplished. Heaven will pass away rather than the Doctrine of Jesus Christ could fail."

In speaking of discretion with regard to good works he said that the devils find their amusement in those who let themselves be seen, or come to the fore without necessity, "like a mine, not plugged, which makes a noise but produces no result."

In recommending the holy Exercise of the Presence of God to his penitents, he told them we should do nothing in secret that we would not dare to do in public, because the Presence of God should make more impression on our mind than could be produced by the sight of all creatures collected together.

With regard to fraternal correction St Vincent said that the opportune moment should be chosen.

I do not know if the children of this century

would forgive him for the maxim *that it is better to be exposed to the outrages and the fury of hell than to live without a cross and without humiliations.*

He considered a man was in proximate danger of losing his soul if everything succeeded with him, and he had no contradiction to bear from anyone.

" Prayer," he said, " is necessary for those who consecrate themselves to the service of the Altar, just as a sword is for the soldier."

" The building of which God is not the architect cannot last long. A Community which observes silence exactly is very faithful to the other rules ; on the contrary, in the Community where each one talks at his own pleasure no rule is any longer observed, nor any order."

With regard to vocation the great maxim of the Saint was that the choice of the Priests belongs to God alone, and that vocations which are due to human enticement and maintained by bad faith certainly increase the number of a Community, but spoil and dishonour it. To avoid the former of these two evils he made an inviolable rule for himself never to invite any subject to enter his Congregation, and he forbade his Priests to take any move of that kind. The least trespass on that ground was criminal in his opinion, and he regarded it as an infringement of the designs of God.

He could not even bear anyone to urge on by the slightest impulse those who expressed a desire to enter. In such cases he pointed out to them that such an important engagement requires much reflection, and that consequently one should ponder

over it deeply, and in the Presence of God; that an individual does not risk much by becoming a Missioner, but that it is a capital point with the whole Congregation to possess no subjects except those legitimately called.

The Chartreux and a certain number of other Orders required their Postulants to make a few days' Retreat at St Lazare, and in this they were quite right in counting upon the absolute loyalty of St Vincent. To turn anyone aside from the Order to which he felt himself called appeared to him to be a theft, a sacrilege. He said to his own priests: "By seeking to appropriate to ourselves those whom God does not wish to give us we shall only go against His Holy Will and draw down upon ourselves His Indignation. It belongs to the Father of the family to choose His workers. A Missioner who is offered us by His Fatherly Hand will do more good alone than a great number of others would effect whose vocation is less pure. We must therefore, on the one hand, pray to the Lord to send into His field men who are capable of reaping the harvest, and on the other hand we must study to live so holily that our example may attract them to come and work with us, if God so calls them."

To avoid the second of the two evils pointed out above, and which is near akin to what the law qualifies by the name of "fraud" or "bad faith," the Saint never imitated those who only show the flowers of the Novitiate to the eyes of youth, and do not let them see the thorns of the last stage of

the journey. In the regular routine of the Novitiate there is nothing to disconcert nature, but rather everything necessary to make one foresee how heavily the obligations will begin to weigh on the day the Novitiate ends. Hair shirts are not required, nor chains, nor iron cinctures, nor the discipline, nor any other fasts but those imposed on all the faithful; but instead something else is required, which costs much more: a complete separation from the world, an absolutely retired life, much humility, a very great vigilance over self, a steady Fidelity to all one's duties and, if possible, an inexhaustible fund of that holy sweetness which must one day console and sustain men who are by their very vocation vowed to all that is most painful in the holy ministry and most repugnant to nature.

He wished that the Missioners should be prepared to give their lives for the Love of Jesus Christ, Who gave His own for the salvation of all. "We see every day," he said, "merchants who, for a small gain, cross the seas, exposing themselves to all sorts of dangers; shall we have less courage than they? Are the precious stones that they thus seek, of greater value than the souls for whom we sweat and toil and travel far?" As to those Religious who make efforts to attain to ecclesiastical dignities the Saint gave a splendid lesson one day, in the person of one amongst them who recommended himself for promotion. This Religious, who had a good reputation, who had preached successfully in the first pulpits in the kingdom,

represented to him one day the length of his labours, the austerity of his Rule, the failing of his strength, and the fear he had of not being able to continue much longer rendering these services to Holy Church which he had hitherto done. He added that he had thought of an expedient by means of which he could still labour with advantage; namely, *the Episcopal dignity, which would dispense him from the fasts and the austerities practised in his Order and enable him to preach with more vigour and fruit; he therefore counted on the friendship of the Saint to obtain his nomination from the King.* The Servant of God brought this Religious round to think like himself, *that this was a temptation from the devil*; then, after having expressed all the esteem he felt for his Order, and for himself in particular, he told him that the success attending his functions up to that time indicated clearly that it was the Will of God for him to remain in the state he had embraced, without the slightest sign that He wanted him elsewhere. If God had destined him for the Episcopate he would have found means of bringing this about without leaving the initiative to himself.

"But," continued St Vincent, "I would have something more to say about this way of putting yourself forward; you have no right to expect the blessing of God in a change which a humble soul like yours can neither reasonably desire nor carry out. Besides, by depriving your Order of a man who sustains it by his example, who gives it renown by his learning, and who is one of its principal columns, you will do it considerable harm. By

opening this door you will give others also an occasion to strive to leave their retreat, or at least to feel a disgust for the exercises of penance. Like you, they would find some pretext for mitigating the salutary severity, because nature, which is so quickly tired of austerity and greatly inclined to pamper self, will say, ' It is too excessive, one must moderate the use of it in order to live longer and serve God more ' ; whilst Our Lord says, ' He who loves his life shall lose it, and he who hates his life shall preserve it.' You know better than I do, Rev. Father, all that can be said on this subject, and I would not venture to make my opinion known to you if you had not asked me to do so. Are you not thinking about the crown which is prepared for you ? Oh, God ! how beautiful it will be ! You have already laboured so much to merit it, and maybe there is very little left for you still to do. You need perseverance in the road on which you have started, a road which leads to Heaven. You have already surmounted the greatest difficulties ; therefore you must take courage and hope that God will give you the Grace to overcome the lesser ones." Thus St Vincent cut off every germ of ambition, even of that ambition which, under the appearance of good, sometimes seduces men who are full of virtue and lights.

St. Vincent fought with all his might against scandal-mongers and jealousy, those cruel passions which hate the sight of virtue either in strangers or in their companions. He said that the darts of envy and of backbiting do not strike the hearts of

those against whom they are directed without first transpiercing the Heart of Jesus Christ through and through.

"Those who approach Holy Communion with the ardour of Zaccheus must not blame those who keep away with the humility of the publican." Nevertheless his long experience with regard to the marvellous effects of the Eucharist made him urge everyone to prepare himself to communicate worthily and frequently. "You have done rather wrong," he wrote to one of his penitents (Blessed Louise), "to keep away from Holy Communion on account of the interior pain you experience. Do you not see that this is a temptation, and that by this you are helping on the enemy of this Adorable Sacrament? Could you by any chance imagine that by acting in this way you might become more perfect and better disposed to unite yourself to Our Lord by keeping away from Him? Oh, be sure that, if you had such a thought, you were grossly deceived. We must not therefore be astonished if we become less virtuous when we stay away from Holy Communion." A worthy lady had for a long time, and by the advice of her Director, adopted the practice of going to Communion twice a week. Either curiosity or I know not what whimsical desire of perfection made her give up St Vincent and go to another confessor. Frequent Communion was the "*first sin*" of which the new confessor wished her to correct herself. Thus the lady began to communicate only once a week; then he made her communicate only once

a fortnight, and finally once a month. All the fruit she drew from this privation was that, little by little, the spirit of vanity, of impatience, of anger and the other passions, took possession of her. Her imperfections multiplied, and she found herself in the end in a most deplorable situation. She tried to trace the cause, and found it in the counsels of the new Director; they were hurtful counsels, since they produced such a bad effect. This lady, getting better advice, resumed her former practice, being convinced from that time that to communicate often one must live well, and that to live well one must communicate often. By frequent participation in the Divine Mysteries she found repose of conscience and the remedy for all her imperfections.

PRACTICE.—*Either to speak well of our neighbour or to keep absolute silence about him.*

FOURTEENTH DAY

MORTIFICATION OF ST VINCENT

IF it is glorious to follow Our Lord, we must own that nothing costs more to nature. Indeed, the first step to be taken by those who wish to follow Jesus Christ is to renounce themselves and carry their cross. The Saint found it a difficult matter, but he never left off practising it every moment of his life; and it has been said of him, with perfect truth, that, under the appearance of an ordinary and common existence, he constantly practised the strictest mortification, both interior and exterior. By *interior mortification* I mean that which has for its immediate object the judgment, the will, the inclinations of the heart; the sweetest inspirations of nature. By *exterior mortification* I mean that which crucifies all the senses.

The interior mortification of St Vincent is revealed in a sensible manner in the reformation of his character. One can fight against one's nature, but nearly always it reappears. If it seems to be subdued and in perfect control on occasions that one is able to foresee, it shows itself in its true light when taken unawares in unforeseen circumstances. There are very few men who, when

studying their neighbour, do not end by discovering in him something they had not observed before.

Nature had given St Vincent an austere and forbidding countenance; however, he knew so well how to do violence to himself that all who knew him, always took him for a model of meekness and affability. He himself regarded this change as a sort of miracle, and attributed it to the charitable compassion of some persons who had advised him to assume a less gloomy and austere exterior. He fought against self-love with such constant vigour that, judging by his serenity and kindly appearance, one might have questioned if he belonged to the family of Adam at all. To hide nothing which might draw contempt upon himself, to hide carefully all that might cause him to be honoured, such was his rule. The King's secretary had been a slave in Algiers, and he knew St Vincent had been one in Tunis. He willingly recounted his adventures to the Saint, and keenly desired that he would tell him his own. Many a time he turned the conversation to this matter, but he owned in the evidence that he gave, that he had never obtained a single word. Many times also St Vincent had occasion to speak about these experiences at high society gatherings, but he always kept silence on the subject.

People thought they noticed in him a certain indifference towards his relations; this of course was only the result of strict and constant mortification. He said one day, when people were pressing him to do them some favour: "Do you think

that I do not love my relations? I have all the feelings of affection and tenderness towards them which any other might have for his own, and this natural love urges me to assist them; but I must act according to the motions of Grace, and not those of nature, and I must think of those who are most in need first, without pausing to consider the bonds of friendship or relationship. . . . I must imitate Our Lord, Who in a public meeting refused to recognize His Mother, or His cousins; and in the distribution of alms I must regard as my nearest relations, not those who are so in the flesh, but those who stand in greater need of help. . . . But, then, are not my relations blessed enough? could they be in a better position? for they are carrying out the Divine Will, which condemns man to gain his bread in the sweat of his brow."

The Saint never deviated from these principles even when it was possible for him to do so. One of his friends (Du Fresne) gave him one day a thousand francs to assist his relations. The Man of God did not refuse them, but he remarked to his benefactor that his family could live as they had done hitherto; that this increase of riches would not make them more virtuous; "a good Mission given to the whole parish would be worth more in the eyes of God and of men." His friend yielded to his arguments, but the Saint was not able to carry out his project. The civil wars which broke out desolated Guyenne; St Vincent's relations were amongst the worst hit; they lost all their modest possessions, some of them even their lives. The holy man then

recognized that it was by a special arrangement of Providence that he had not been able to give that Mission. He blessed God for such a special and visible protection, and dispatched in all haste the assistance prepared by Heaven for his family. This was the only time St Vincent ever helped materially his relations in order to rescue them out of utter destitution, even though he could have easily procured a comfortable living for every one of them.

Another proof of his perfect interior mortification is the evenness of mind which he possessed in an eminent degree. His life furnishes us with such examples of it that one scarcely finds even in the lives of great saints. We have seen him remaining equally calm and tranquil in the midst of the havocs of war as in the joys of peace ; in sickness as well as in the most vigorous health ; in successes as in the most discouraging failures. To reach such a degree of serenity one must have, so to speak, ceased to live the ordinary life of a mortal and to say with St Paul, " I live, no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." One must have buried the old man, with all his concupiscences, and be no longer tossed by passion or desire.

It was just the same with his exterior mortifications. Although he took all imaginable precautions to hide some of them and to put people off the scent, he was well enough known on this point to be given a place amongst the greatest penitents. Here are some revelations made at the Process of his Canonization :

St Vincent scarcely ever went to bed before mid-

night, because the very serious and multiplied affairs with which he was overwhelmed did not permit him to go earlier. His bed consisted of a wretched mattress; whether well or ill, he rose regularly at four o'clock in the morning. On awaking he took the discipline. A Brother who occupied the next room assures us that the Saint had never omitted this practice during the twelve years he had lived next to him. To these austerities he added others, to obtain some particular graces, or to appease the anger of God during public calamities. His haircloth, which is still preserved, makes even those shudder who are accustomed to such mortifications. Besides, it is by chance only that we know anything about the extent and degree of his penances, for he was as diligent in keeping them hidden as he was ardent in practising them.

Every morning, even during the most severe winters, he spent more than three hours in prayer, divided between his meditation, his preparation for Holy Mass and his Thanksgiving. He remained kneeling on the bare pavement, without ever allowing a mat to be placed where he was accustomed to kneel. Being an enemy of any pampering of his body, one might almost say an executioner of his body, although his legs were swollen and he suffered from the attacks of a quartan ague for half the year, he worked hard with the same diligence as when he had enjoyed perfect health. Besides the fasts prescribed by the Church (from which he never dispensed himself), he usually fasted twice a week; neither old age nor his infirmities could

make him relinquish the custom. His nourishment was always most ordinary; there was never any difference made between him and the least of his Congregation, either in the quantity or quality of the food. He generally chose for himself what was least appetizing, and for fear of yielding to sensuality, which is so apt to glide in everywhere, he sprinkled some bitter powder over his food, which made it disagreeable to the taste. In whatever place he found himself he ate and drank very little; not that he had no appetite, but he had made a law for himself never to satisfy it to the full. When he dined at the second table he took care to sit amongst the servants so that he might be served with the remains of the first table. If it happened that they had cleared the table and carried away the wine he did not ask for any, but drank water, although nobody else had such need of keeping up his strength as he had. However late he might be coming in for his dinner, whether at two o'clock or even at three o'clock in the afternoon, he was invariably still fasting.

At the age of sixty years and more, he fasted during Lent more strictly than a robust man, in the flower of his age. Salted codfish, herrings and other salted fish were his only nourishment, like the rest of the Community. Sometimes they tried to deceive him at the second table by serving him fresh fish instead of the salted fish served to his brethren, but the love of mortification made him watchful, and he defeated the innocent artifice. He asked what had been served at the first table and

wished to be treated with the same, otherwise he would not eat it. In the evening a piece of bread, an apple and some water tinged with wine formed his supper. Sometimes, even when it was not a fast day, if he happened to come in a little late, he would go to his room without eating anything.

Speech served him only to preach virtue, or to correct vice, and he would not listen to any conversations which did not promote what is good. It was well understood that he closed his ears to vain gossiping or useless chatter and, far more strictly, to every word capable of wounding charity.

As to the senses, especially the sense of taste, he had subdued them to an extraordinary degree. Cold and heat, what was good and what was bad, were to him indifferent. There are few persons of whom one can say that they do not prefer one kind of food to another; as for St Vincent, the Brother who had charge of him took great pains to discover his preferences, but without succeeding in finding a single one. He drank in long draughts, and repeatedly, the most bitter and repugnant medicine; as for eating, he only took food apparently because a man may not starve himself to death.

He used often to say that true mortification does not spare either soul or body; that it immolates the judgment, the will, the senses, the passions, all the sweetest and most natural inclinations. The *judgment* is to be sanctified by readiness to make more of the ideas of others than of one's own; the *will* by following the example of Our Lord, Who in the whole course of His Life never did His own

Will, but only that of His Heavenly Father, "*Quæ placita sunt ei, facio semper*"; the *senses*, by keeping them submissive to God, and especially by watching strictly over curiosity of the eyes and the ears, a curiosity which is so dangerous in itself and so powerful in driving our mind away from the thought of God.

The natural instincts themselves, and especially that tendency which is so predominating in many men to be preoccupied about their health, were also with him material for mortification. "For," he repeated, "this exaggerated solicitude for one's health, and this fear of suffering pain which we see in some people, who seem to fix their whole mind and attention on the care of their miserable body, are great obstacles to the service of God, as it deprives them of freedom in the following of Jesus Christ.

"Gentlemen and Brothers, we are disciples of the Divine Saviour; and yet He finds us like slaves chained up, and chained to what? A little feeling of well-being! . . . Oh, my Lord, give us the grace to free ourselves from this self-centred existence; grant, if Thou pleasest, that we may even hate ourselves, so as to love Thee more perfectly. Thou Who are Perfect Wisdom, Thou Who are the mortal enemy of all sensuality, give us the spirit of mortification and the Grace always to resist the excessive love of self, which is the germ of all our sensuality."

Ever an implacable enemy of sensuality, St. Vincent fought against the very shadow of it.

"There is no vice," he said to his spiritual sons, "which is more opposed to the spirit which must animate you than this one; nothing is more capable of making you lose all relish for your holy vocation than this vice. A Missioner should live as though he had no body; he must fear neither heat nor cold; neither sickness nor hunger, nor the other miseries of life. He must esteem himself happy to suffer something for Jesus Christ; but if he fears discomforts and fatigue and hard labour he is not worthy of the name and cannot be of any use. A small number of priests who have renounced all satisfaction of the flesh will do more good than a crowd of others who are possessed by no greater fear than that of injuring their health. They think they are wise; and their wisdom is carnal. Woe to him who flies from crosses, for he will meet with such heavy ones that they will crush him."

PRACTICE.—*Impose on yourself to-day some privation in honour of the Blessed Virgin.*

FIFTEENTH DAY

OCCUPATIONS OF ST VINCENT

ST VINCENT, who regarded himself as a useless servant, was so constantly occupied from morning till evening that his life was one uninterrupted succession of good works. Anyone being equally laborious but less sustained by grace would have succumbed under the weight of affairs. It seems inconceivable that a man afflicted with infirmities, and without ever omitting a single one of his exercises of piety, could undertake successfully so many varied works, give the finishing touches to so many affairs, answer the prodigious number of letters which reached him from every side, and direct with every care the two Congregations he had established.

Only a small section of the letters which he wrote to France, Italy, Barbary and still more distant countries exist still; yet their number is astonishing, and still more wonderful is the variety of the matters with which he had to deal. Bishops, Abbots (and some of the best known) and enlightened Directors consulted him on matters of great delicacy and importance. Princesses asked him for Missions to their lands, a service which he

never refused. At one time it would be the Congregation for Propagation of the Faith begging him to send priests for Foreign Missions; at another time some afflicted mother, who, hearing from some far-off corner of the kingdom of his great charity, begged him to take an interest in her son, who had been taken as a slave to Algiers, and who was therefore in danger of his life and of his faith. One day it was a renegade from Algiers who appealed to his charity, to find means to get out of his apostasy; another day perhaps an Abbess, who, discouraged by the difficulties of her charge, sought advice about her Community. To-day it is a young man who, after a few months' novitiate, is tempted to withdraw from the Monastery; to-morrow it will be the Apostolic Nuncios, Bagni and Piccolomini, who desire to have his opinion on questions concerning the particular welfare of some dioceses, or the general good of the Church.

Often it will be some holy Religious who has recourse to him as to a father, ever ready to come to his aid in the arduous work of reformation of his Order or some equally thorny affair. One morning he presides over an august assembly to discuss plans, criticized and disapproved by the worldly wise, but which justice and religion demanded. In the evening some Missioner calls to have his vocation settled, and be brought back to his first fervour. Or perhaps, again, some virtuous priest who does not appreciate the need of relaxation or repose, and whose zeal must be moderated so that he may be able to work longer. In fine, all his letters are

full of the spirit of him who wrote them ; a spirit of humility, meekness, disinterestedness, wisdom, uprightness, charity, submission to the Will of God in all things ; these are the marks with which they are all stamped.

During the life of the Saint the House of St Lazare resembled the House of the Prophet at the period of the last judges of Israel ; he was like an oracle, to which those had recourse who contemplated some good work in order to seek the advice they needed from the inspirations of the man of God. Besides the general assemblies at which he assisted regularly three times a week, he was often called for the nomination of Bishops, Professors, Superiors of Communites and of other officials ; or it might be to check some serious disorder, to advise remedies in a wise policy, to re-establish peace in Monastery or home.

Except during the time consecrated every year to his Spiritual Retreat, he went out nearly every day on errands of charity. On his return to the house, and after having recited his office on his knees, he interviewed those who wished to speak to him, either of his own clerics or from outside. If to these important engagements we add the cares of the different Missions of the Congregation, the Daughters of Charity and the Religious of the Visitation, of whom he took special care up to his death, we must conclude that his were *full* years, and that he never knew those *empty* months which are condemned by Holy Scripture.

It is surprising to hear of such great undertakings

in a man of advanced age, on the brink of Eternity. But our Saint, overburdened as he was, never halted until the eve of his death; up to that day he still dispatched all business with astonishing precision and presence of mind.

He often gathered together those who had charges in the house as well as his assistants; he spoke to them all not only in a mass together, but also separately whenever it was necessary, going over with them and discussing every item of their days. He regulated everything concerning the Missions, choosing such subjects as were best fitted for the work and discussing with them the means most likely to succeed.

These methods he employed not only with his own Congregation, but also for others of which he had charge. When prevented from leaving the house he sent one of his priests to take his place, and if it was anything of importance, he gave him minute instructions, so that he need only follow exactly his recommendations to succeed well.

His answers to letters from the Province gave the impression that his health always remained fair. Though his correspondence was enormous he never failed to answer every letter. He wrote on all kinds of subjects, but never more willingly than to alleviate misery or give help in poverty; it is worthy of note that the very last letters he dated were about the needs of the poor and the relief that could be given them.

Overwhelmed with work, assailed by the importunities of a crowd of persons of all conditions who

besieged him, he was ever, under the eyes of all, a man of peace and of consolation. In his person the office of Martha accorded so well with that of Mary that in the midst of the most trying occupations he seemed more than ever to work for God alone, and under the very eye of God. When we remember his faithfulness to his spiritual duties we can fairly judge how much he knew the value of time. He would have scrupled to lose one moment, and thus in God's eyes he doubled the value of his years.

He went to bed the last of all, his day was fully spent in prayer, in giving or receiving advice, in deliberating, in action. His priests had an hour's recreation after each meal, but he rarely enjoyed this, as some pressing business usually called him elsewhere.

In spite of all his condescension, especially towards strangers, hearing patiently all that they had to say to him, yet he knew how to cut short all useless conversation, even at pious reunions in aid of the poor, where he would cut short all digressions. His speech was concise, and his ideas clear; consequently he knew how to bring those back to the point who were wandering from it; but he did it with such good grace that nobody could find fault with it.

Concentration on most important affairs never seemed to exhaust the vigour of his mind; but (and this is more surprising) he would leave everything with incredible readiness when the poor or humble petitioners interrupted him.

Every day during his latter years he prepared himself for death by reciting the prayers for the agonizing, with the recommendation of the soul to God; and every evening he made ready to answer the Divine Judge, in case it might please Him to summon him before the Supreme Tribunal during that night.

PRACTICE.—*An act of contrition, to ask God's pardon for the time we have lost; and a promise to be exact and punctual in the accomplishment of our duties, as also to spend in a holy manner the days which the Lord will still grant us.*

SIXTEENTH DAY

PATIENCE OF ST VINCENT

PATIENCE too is an efficacious means of salvation: "*In patentia possidebitis animas vestras*," says the Lord.

This virtue was so deeply rooted in the heart of St Vincent that he felt uneasy whenever he was deprived of any affliction, either in his own person or in that of his children. He said to them one day: "I was thinking . . . that the Company was suffering nothing, that everything was successful and prospering; let us even say that it was blessed by God in every way, without experiencing either reverses or vexations. I began to mistrust this tranquillity, knowing that it is God's Way to exercise those whom He loves. I remember what was related of St Ambrose, who on one of his journeys stopped at a house, where he heard that the master did not know the very meaning of affliction; on hearing this the holy bishop, enlightened by heavenly wisdom, concluded that this house, being treated so mildly, was near its ruin. '*Let us leave this place*,' he exclaimed, '*the anger of God is going to fall upon this house*.' And, in fact, no sooner was he outside than the lightning, over-

throwing it, buried in its ruins all those who were within!

"On the other hand," he continued, "I saw several Communities who were troubled from time to time, and a prey to terrible persecutions . . . and I said to myself: '*This is how God would treat us if we were solidly established in virtue.* But, knowing our weakness, He lifts us up and feeds us with milk, like little children, and makes everything succeed with us, almost without our putting out a finger; I was right therefore, on these grounds, to fear that we were not pleasing to God nor worthy to suffer anything for love of Him. . . .'"

What he said to the whole Community in general he said to one of the Superiors of his houses, who was explaining the difficulties he found in governing: "Oh, sir, would you like to be without any suffering? It would be better for you to be seized by a devil than to be without a cross. Yes, for in that case the devil could do no injury to the soul; but if one had nothing to suffer, neither soul nor body would be conformed to Jesus Christ suffering; and nevertheless this conformity is the sign of our predestination. Therefore do not be astonished at your troubles, since the Son of God has chosen them for your salvation."

To one of his Missioners he said: "Is not your heart greatly consoled to find that you have been found worthy in God's sight to suffer in His service? Certainly you owe Him special gratitude for this, and you are bound to ask Him for the grace to make a good use of it."

To another: "Well, sir, we must go to God *per infamiam et bonam famam*, and His Divine Goodness shows us mercy when He allows us to be publicly blamed or to be despised. I have no doubt that you accepted patiently the shame of what took place. If the glory of the world is nothing but smoke, the reverse is something very solid if it is accepted in the right way, and I hope that great good will come to us out of this humiliation. May God grant us the grace of many other humiliations, that through them we may deserve to be more pleasing to Him. We must ardently desire to have crosses, and I will say, with St Francis Xavier: '*Still more, O Lord, still more.*'"

The patience of the Saint in hardships, or rather his love of sufferings, never appeared with so much splendour as in his sickness. A Missioner, who was touched by the state in which he saw the venerable old man, allowed this complaint to escape his lips: "*Oh, Father, how grievous are your sufferings!*" "What!" interrupted the saintly invalid, "do you call the work of God and what He ordains *grievous*, in making a miserable sinner like me to suffer? May God forgive you, sir, for what you have just said, for that is not the language of Jesus Christ! Is it not just that the guilty should suffer? In any case, do we not belong to God rather than to ourselves?"

He said to his Community: "We must acknowledge that the state of sickness is a difficult one, and almost unbearable to nature, and yet it is one of the most powerful means of which God makes use to

bring us back to our duty, to detach us from affection to sin, and to fill us with His gifts and graces. . . . It is by this means, gentlemen, that souls are purified, and those who possess no virtue have an efficacious means of acquiring it. Indeed, one could not find a better chance to practise it. In sickness faith is marvellously tried; hope shines brightly therein; resignation, the Love of God and all the virtues find ample scope for practice. . . ."

St Vincent had always been subject to a slight fever, which lasted sometimes for three or four days, and sometimes a fortnight or more. During these attacks he would not seek any relief, and never interrupted his labours or exercises. To this fever was added a quartan ague, which attacked him once or twice every year; he took no more notice of it than of the former. Although in similar cases he would have had the least of his brethren taken to the infirmary, he himself never did go, at any rate not before he was more than eighty years old and the weakness of his body got the better of his courage. The remainder of his life became an ever-increasing complication of troubles. In 1656 a fever, which lasted several days, brought on a serious inflammation of the leg; he had to keep to his bed for many days. His brethren took advantage of this opportunity to install him in a room with a fire, for up to this it had been impossible to persuade him to make use of one.

This slight relief soon became far more necessary for him. The inflammation in his legs increased so

much that he needed the patience of a Saint to endure his sufferings. The disease spread to the two knees, and in the end the left leg broke out at the ankle. Two years later fresh ulcers formed, and early in 1659 the pain of the knees became so great that it was no longer possible for him to leave the house. Nevertheless he continued for some time to go down to the church for meditation and Mass. But towards the end of the same year this too became impossible and he was obliged to celebrate Holy Mass in the infirmary chapel. Some time after his legs failed him altogether, and he could no longer ascend the altar and had to content himself with hearing Holy Mass, which he did until the day of his death.

To these habitual infirmities another was added; it caused him such suffering that he exclaimed sometimes, in the words of St Bernard: "If it is thus Thou treatest Thy friends in the time of mercy, what wilt Thou do to Thy enemies in Thy vengeance?"

The state to which the Saint was now reduced showed him plainly that the end was not far, although as yet there was no indication of failure or decline. Sickness, which usually saddens those who pass through great sufferings, seemed to produce the contrary effect on him. All those who came to visit him (and they came at all hours, both strangers and inmates) always found him with a serene and smiling face, his words and manner mellowed by that sweetness which wins all hearts. If he were asked about his health he spoke in such a way as to give the impression that it did not

matter; then, turning the conversation from his own sufferings, he began to discuss their trials. When the pain became almost intolerable no other words escaped his lips but this very tender exclamation: "*Oh! my Saviour; my good Saviour!*" Then he gave a glance at the Crucifix which he kept before him, and he felt fresh strength to endure his sickness. In all his behaviour one could recognize the solid Christian principles which St Vincent contemplated in the Life of Our Lord, his Great Model, Who had willed to pass through the most severe trials and endure the bitterest hatred let loose against Him on the shameful cross of Calvary.

Again, what rendered him so calm in the midst of his greatest sufferings was that, on the one hand, sorrows never pour upon us except by the Will of God, according to the words of the prophet (Amos iii. 6): "*Si est malum in civitate, quod non fecerit Dominus?*" ("Shall evil befall a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"); and on the other hand, the Lord only afflicts His servants when He has merciful designs upon them.* He thence concluded that those who suffer are loved by Heaven and cherished in the same proportion, and at the very time they receive: *desolation upon desolation, and trouble upon trouble.*

He said that "one single day of temptation brings more merit than many years of tranquillity; a soul always in a state of calm and repose resembles those stagnant waters which become muddy and

* "Whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Hebrews xii. 6.)

infected; on the contrary, the soul shaken by tribulation resembles those streams that run through rocks and pebbles, and the waters of which are sweet and pure as crystal. Crosses teach us not only patience, but also compassion towards our neighbour, and Jesus Christ willed to suffer so much that we might possess in His Person a Pontiff Who could have compassion on our weakness."

His last principle on this point was that of St Paul: that "*God does not permit us to be tempted or afflicted beyond our strength, but that He helps us by His grace to draw profit from the pains and contradictions that we have to bear.*" He maintained that these troubles and contradictions are a pledge of the happiest success. Indeed experience had proved to him a hundred times that Missions and other exercises of his Congregation never succeeded better than when they had cost much to nature. It was just this conviction which made him say, about some serious affliction which befell several of his priests, that if they knew how to make the same use of their persecutions as the Apostles did they would overthrow the devil by his own weapons.

PRACTICE.—*Let us take courage in suffering for the Love of God. If our soul is filled with joy at the thought of the greatness of the promised reward, we must not be frightened at the thought of what we must suffer in order to take possession of it. My Jesus, accept, for Thy greater Glory, and for my own spiritual advantage, all the pains which I shall have to endure until the hour of my death.*

SEVENTEENTH DAY

POVERTY OF ST VINCENT

THE more the heart of man becomes detached from the things of this world the closer he gets to Heaven, and the better he knows Jesus Christ. This disposition gives birth to the spirit of poverty, which consists in detaching oneself from the things of the world and only using them in so far as they may lead to everlasting happiness. Before he was aware of God's designs upon him St Vincent had good grounds for dreaming about a state of life worth living; indeed he declared later on that he had always felt a secret inspiration in his soul which made him desire to possess nothing of his own, and to live in Community. God granted him both the one and the other. He became the Father of a numerous family, and, although the state in which Providence placed him was not incompatible with *the right of ownership*, still St Vincent knew how to make it compatible with the most rigorous poverty.

In general, he took all that was bad for himself. He wore his clothes for as long as it was possible, or he took those which other priests about his own size had already worn for a long time, so that he

might avoid having new things. The necessity of appearing frequently at Court did not make him change anything in his dress; he presented himself before the King in the clothes he wore at home. Cardinal Mazarin, taking hold of him one day by his worn-out cincture, said to those round about the Queen: "Look at Mr. Vincent's Court dress; and what a magnificent cincture he wears!" Perhaps at the hour of death this wealthy minister of State would have very willingly changed soul and fortune with this poor priest.

His meals corresponded with his clothing, and his lodging with both. As to nourishment, the only difference noticeable between his brethren and himself was his strict abstinence. He was only pleased when something was wanting, and willingly dined on what was left, or on what the others had not wanted. Sickness made no difference. In his most acute sufferings he believed himself to be prohibited from taking what others were not allowed to take. He thought the example of St Francis Xavier was admirable, when he had to beg for his bread, which he also did himself sometimes. As he never carried any money, when he was in the country and was pressed by hunger he would go to some woman and beg for a piece of bread for the Love of God. Doubtless his meagre fare testified to an incredible sobriety, and yet, seeing nothing in himself but a useless servant who has no right to be nourished, he reproached himself for even this small amount of poor food and repeated that expression, which was as familiar to him as it was unsuitable: "Oh,

miserable man, thou certainly hast not earned the bread thou eatest."

His lodging was as simple as could be imagined: a room without a fireplace, a bed without curtains, a palliasse without a mattress, a table without a cloth, bare walls, two straw chairs, one paper picture, a wooden crucifix—that was all the furniture of his room. The King's Chief Physician was astonished to see a man of such great merit and such high reputation lodged so miserably, and he declared that he had found nothing there except what was absolutely necessary.

The spirit of poverty followed him everywhere. If he was obliged to warm himself a little in the winter he spared as much of the wood as possible to give to the poor. He wished the ornaments for his churches to be of a plain material, except on Feast days. When they attempted to replace the old worn-out furniture by new he had it removed immediately. "Whatever the House possesses," he said, "is the patrimony of the poor; we are only the managers, and not the owners, and we shall have to render a strict account for all that is not necessary for us. . . . Although we are not, strictly speaking, Religious, as it was not found expedient that we should be so and we are not worthy of it, still we live in Community, and poverty is the bond of Communities, and especially of ours; it is the bond which, releasing it from all earthly things, attaches it perfectly to God. . . . Alas! what will become of our Society if we give way to greed of these riches, which the Apostle says are the root of

all evils? . . . And if this misfortune should happen to the Society . . . how could one live in it? Some would say: '*We have so many thousand pounds of revenue, why not stay in peace . . . why labour so hard? Let us leave the poor country people alone; let their curates take care of them as they think best; as for us, let us live quietly, without bothering ourselves so much.*' Thus laziness would result from the spirit of avarice; one would henceforth be occupied only in preserving and increasing one's temporal goods and in seeking one's own ease. One might bid adieu to all the exercises of the Mission, and to the Mission itself, for it would exist no longer. One need only read history to find numberless examples which prove that riches and abundance of temporal goods have caused the destruction, not only of many ecclesiastics, but of whole Communities and of entire Orders, through their not having been faithful to their first spirit of poverty."

One of his priests represented to him one day the needs of his House. "What is your procedure," the Saint asked him, "when you are thus short of necessities for the Community? Do you have recourse to God?" "Yes, sometimes," answered the priest. "Well," he replied, "that is poverty; it makes us think of God. . . . If we were comfortable we should perhaps forget God. And for this reason I am overjoyed that voluntary and real poverty is practised in our Houses. There is a hidden grace which underlies poverty which we do not realize." "But," replied the priest, "you procure goods for others, and yet you leave your

own without any." "I beg God," said St Vincent, "to pardon you for these words; I see well that you have spoken thus in simplicity, but know this: that we are never more rich than when we are like Jesus Christ."

Such counsels, confirmed as they are by the example of him who gave them, made a deep impression on his children; indeed, speaking generally, no created thing seemed to have any attraction for them. St Vincent was never lavish with his praises in their regard, especially if they were present. However, one day, after having told them that a man who has the true spirit of poverty *fears nothing, can do everything, can go everywhere*, he was obliged to do them justice by adding: *That through the Mercy of God this spirit did exist in the Congregation; that we must beg God to preserve it and esteem ourselves happy to die after the example of our Divine Saviour, Who began His mortal life in a manger and ended it on the Cross.*

PRACTICE.—*Let us think now how to make good use of riches; otherwise they will become thorns, which will make us suffer at the hour of our death. "We shall never be so rich as when we shall be like to Jesus Christ," Who had not even a stone whereon to lay His Head.*

EIGHTEENTH DAY

PRUDENCE OF ST VINCENT

CHRISTIAN prudence consists in making use of the means we have in hand to attain everlasting happiness. St Vincent said that prudence must always tend to one sole end, which is God. It selects means, regulates actions and words, and performs everything with circumspection, gravity, harmony and moderation. The object being good, the motives will be also. Prudence consults reason, but as the lights of reason are often feeble it seeks information from the light of faith given to us by Jesus Christ, through which we know that Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the Word of the Lord lasts for ever.

In order to act on these principles the Saint, when consulted on any business, raised his heart to God to implore His assistance; and he invited those who came to ask his advice to pray with him, that God might make known His Will about the matter. Then he listened attentively, weighed everything carefully, sought out all that it was necessary to know, for fear of omitting any circumstance of importance in forming his judgment. If it was something very important he asked for time to

reflect upon it, and advised that it should be recommended to God. That others besides himself should have been consulted also, gave him the greatest pleasure; frequently and willingly he consulted others, and set great value on their advice, for justice and charity are always united. When he had to give his own opinion he did it in such a judicious and unauthoritative manner that, whilst expressing what he thought was best, he left people entire freedom to follow their own choice. When they insisted that he should declare his opinion in a more positive manner, he did so, with precision and to the purpose, without ever attacking those who thought differently. He then imposed on himself a double rule: to keep the matter on which he had been consulted under the seal of inviolable secrecy, and then to remain firm in the decision arrived at.

It was very difficult for him to take a false step, and until his death he passed for the most prudent man of his century. During his life the House of St Lazare was a kind of centre where all those assembled who had conceived vast plans for the service of the Church, or for the good of their neighbour—Bishops, Magistrates, Rectors, Doctors, Religious, Abbots, Superiors of Communities—all flocked to him as *the oracle of the time*. His prudence, which was so highly appreciated, induced the holy Bishop of Geneva and the venerable Mother de Chantal to ask him to accept the direction of their first Monastery in Paris. It was this same reputation for prudence which decided Louis XIII to call him to his side at a time when he had great

need of good advice. It was also the wisdom of his counsels given to the dying King, and by which the Court was edified in the highest degree, that induced the Queen to call him to preside over her Councils. To know the utmost extent of this prudence we should have to follow St Vincent from the day he first went to Mr. Gondi until his death. The reader will be able to form an idea by recalling the wise regulations he drew up to suit such varied occasions; the means adopted by him, with such success, for the numerous establishments of which he was the founder; the constitutions given to his Congregation; his conduct during the political troubles of the kingdom; the advice and counsels which his office and his charity made it a duty to give. We will only give one example.

A great preacher of exalted rank paid frequent visits to the Saint, and for a good reason. St Vincent was warned that his principles in matters of faith were not very orthodox, and his religion not very deep, as his conduct seemed to indicate. To make him enter into himself St Vincent said to him: "How clever and eloquent you are, sir! I have an advice to ask you. On our country Missions we sometimes meet with persons who do not believe the truths of our holy Religion, and we do not know how to deal with them in order to convince them. What should we do on these occasions?" This question was not too agreeable to the Abbé, who answered with some emotion: "Why do you ask me this?" "Because," said St Vincent, "the poor appeal to the rich in their needs, and we, ignorant

as we are, cannot do better than learn from you, who are well educated, what we do not know ourselves." These words calmed the ecclesiastic. He answered with much presence of mind that he would prove matters of faith, first, by Holy Scripture; second, by the Holy Fathers; third, by some reasonable argument; fourth, by the universal consent of Catholic nations in past centuries; fifth, by the testimony of the martyrs who shed their blood for the confession of these same truths; and by all the miracles operated by God in order to confirm them.

When he had finished St Vincent, after having declared that he thought this an excellent method, begged him to put down in writing, "simply and without ceremony," all that he had said by word of mouth and to send it to him. The Abbé did not fail, and a few days later he himself brought the writing to the man of God. . . . "I feel a wonderful joy," St Vincent said to him, "to see you have such fine sentiments. . . . It will even be useful to me for your vindication. You will scarcely believe it, but it is a fact that certain persons believe and affirm that you have not the right sentiments touching the things of Faith. . . . Well, now, having so worthily upheld the Faith by your writings, it would be better still to prove it by an edifying life. You are so much the more called to it as you hold such a high position; for virtue joined to high birth is like a precious stone, which shines brighter when encased in gold than in lead." It is not recorded whether the wise admonition

produced its effect or not; at any rate this much is certain: the Abbé promised to conform his conduct thereto.

He knew especially how to choose the right moment for calling anyone to order, and he did it so prudently that he rather sought to make the person open his heart to him than hinder it by harsh rebuke. The Superioress of a Visitation Convent said that in St Vincent one found so much prudence, and such sound judgment on all kinds of matters, that nothing escaped his searching knowledge, and that even in the most obscure and entangled affairs he always found the right solution.

According to the testimony of four renowned men who gave evidence at the Process of Canonization, St Vincent was a man of extraordinary breadth of mind and great skill in business affairs. For this reason a great number of persons of high position had recourse to him for advice; his kindness and humility made him even-tempered in his dealings with everyone; even the most learned did not find him inferior to themselves when discussing most important affairs with him. . . . St Vincent showed such prudence in everything that, even when justice and reason compelled him to go counter to others, no one could complain of his decision. Such was the opinion which the most eminent men of the time had formed of the Servant of God; they corroborated the evidence given in his favour by thousands of witnesses whose testimony is not less worthy of confidence.

PRACTICE.—*That Christian is prudent who keeps the affairs of his soul in order. He is also prudent who acts and advises others according to the maxims of religion. But woe to him who is prudent only about the things of this world and neglects those of the soul. He will experience a very cruel disillusion at the hour of death.*

NINETEENTH DAY

PURITY OF ST VINCENT

A MAN who only sought mortification and mortified his flesh by every penitential austerity, such a man, it is easily understood, possessed great mastery over himself. In spite of this St Vincent was watchful and timid, as though he saw beside him the angel of Satan, who buffeted St Paul. In order to paralyse the attempts of this cruel enemy of souls he imposed early on himself the five following rules, from which he never swerved :

(1) The first was never to visit any lady, not even a Lady of Charity, at least unless the Glory of God required it.

(2) In such company his conversations were very short, and his whole exterior marked with perfect modesty. His eyes never rested on any of these persons, and his expression was serious. He kept his eyes modestly cast down, without effort and without affectation, so that he resembled an angel rather than a man.

(3) Even when eighty years old he never remained alone with a woman, either at home or outside. Everywhere he took a companion, who had orders not to leave him for a moment.

(4) If they were speaking of matters of conscience this companion withdrew a little aside so that he could not hear what was said, although never out of sight. A noble lady (wife of the Field-Marshal of Schomberg) having come to pay a visit to St Vincent at St Lazare, the Brother who should have accompanied him to the parlour withdrew out of respect for the lady and closed the door. The Saint immediately recalled him, pointed out his fault and forbade him to go away. This happened on several occasions.

(5) Doubltess he must often have had to do with persons who were in need of consolation, but to dispel the bitterness of their heart he never made use of anything but the words of Holy Scripture, always keeping clear of those affectionate expressions which would not cure one evil without creating another. "I wish to believe," he said in speaking of a letter which was expressed in too tender terms, and about which he was consulted, "I wish to believe that the person who wrote it saw no harm in it, but one must own that this letter is capable of creating an undesirable impression on a susceptible mind, and one less strong than your own. May the Lord preserve us from having frequent intercourse with any person who can exercise such a bad influence on our mind."

Knowing that purity is like those mirrors of which a light breath tarnishes the splendour, his prudence in speech reached the limits of circumspection. The word *Chastity* seemed to him to be too expressive; he replaced it by *Purity*, of

which the meaning is wider and less explicit. When speaking of the disorders of those victims of debauchery who not only wreck their own souls, but also ruin so many others, he alluded to them by the name of *poor creatures*, and their misconduct he called their misfortune. Any speech that was rather free made him suddenly blush, and if he were able he would immediately reproach those who had spoken thus in his presence. He was, like his Divine Master, calumniated on various points, but thanks to these wise precautions his reputation, like that of his Master, remained always intact as regards purity. On the contrary, he was considered (and he well deserved it) as one of the most zealous protectors of Chastity. We know that on his Missions he managed to snatch from imminent danger a number of young girls and women who were being sorely tempted to yield. In the provinces desolated by war he fed and clothed an enormous number of them, who would probably have been drawn into the gravest disorders through misery and hunger. Lorraine, where his memory will never perish, is indebted to him for the honour of her young girls, whom he brought to Paris in numerous groups, and who through the intervention of the Ladies of Charity were given a shelter with pious persons. It was under his auspices that two holy well-to-do widows opened their homes to thousands of pure young maidens, who were rescued from most serious and imminent danger of losing their innocence. St Vincent insisted that, although living in retreat, these maidens still needed

to be watched carefully, and he would not have them lost sight of for a single moment.

St Vincent was just as attentive in preserving the purity of outsiders as he was with regard to his own children. I must confess that if one did not know how great is the corruption of the human heart one would think he carried his precautions even to excess.

A Parish Priest (or, to be more correct, one of his own priests, who had charge of souls) asked him if he should take a companion when visiting the sick. He answered: "Oh, my God, we must be on our guard not to fail in this. When the Son of God ordered His Apostles to go two and two He doubtless saw great harm in sending them alone. Now who would wish to depart from a custom which He introduced amongst His own, and which the Company has always followed? Experience has taught many religious Communities that to avoid malicious tongues it is necessary to leave the infirmary door open, and the bed curtains drawn away in convents, whilst the confessors are administering the Sacraments to the sick. . . ."

He was consulted one day by a priest of upright and simple mind if, in order to judge of the serious state of invalids, with a view to administering the Last Sacraments, he could feel their pulse. "One should be careful not to make use of this practice," replied the Saint, "for the evil spirit can avail himself of this pretext to tempt both the living and the dying. The devil leaves no stone unturned to tempt the soul at the supreme moment. The vigour

of the mind may still remain although the body may be weakened." (Here the Saint quoted the testimony of a dying man who in his last moments declared that he believed himself still in danger of these kinds of temptations.) "Besides," he concluded, "if you wish to know the condition of the patient, ask some doctor or other person present to render you this service."

The Saint required that one should sometimes abstain from actions which were lawful, and even good and holy, if according to the judgment of those who are our guides these things might give rise to suspicion. And this, because, of all suspicions, just or unjust, there are none which strike such a terrible blow at a priest, at his virtue, or at his functions, as that which casts a cloud upon the purity of his principles. What he prescribed to his ecclesiastics he advised also to seculars, because, although there may be no harm in these private conversations, they give occasion for thinking so; and, further, the means to preserve purity is to avoid all occasions which might tarnish it.

Notwithstanding his strictness, St Vincent was too enlightened a man to desire anyone to become frightened by foolish imaginations merely crossing through the mind, and from which the purest saints are not exempt. He wrote to one of his own: "You must not allow yourself to be depressed by the temptations you experience; this is a trial which God sends you to humble you and make you afraid of your own weakness, but you must trust completely in Him. His Grace is sufficient to

enable you to avoid sin and to make you recognize how much you need His help. Accustom yourself to hide your heart in the sacred Wounds of Jesus Christ every time that you are assailed by such impurities ; Here is a refuge which is not accessible to the devil."

PRACTICE.—*Let him who desires to preserve the precious virtue of purity strictly avoid familiarities with the opposite sex. Let us also avoid, on this point, every word which might be wrongly interpreted.*

TWENTIETH DAY

GRATITUDE OF ST VINCENT

INGRATITUDE, although a very common vice, is none the less an offence against the Divinity, the Principle of all Good, and against men, whom God makes use of to dispense His gifts. St. Vincent had all the horror for this detestable vice which every honest man should have. He would have wished, if possible, to have such a gratitude towards God as to thank Him not only for all the goods which he had received from Him, but for all those also which every creature has received and was receiving every day. He thanked Him for all the favours He had granted to mankind since the beginning of the world, and for those He continues to lavish on us; and especially for all good deeds, of which His Grace has ever been the source. The protection with which Our Lord shields His Holy Church, His pastors and all those who work for His spiritual children; the good fruits produced by well-directed Communities; the success of Retreats, of Conferences, of Seminaries and Missions; the prosperity of kings and Christian princes; the humiliation of the enemies of Religion; in a word, all events which give Glory to God and promote the

good of the Catholic Religion, such were his usual objects of gratitude towards God.

He was heard saying that one should spend as much time in thanking God for a benefit as in asking for it. Gratitude, he said, is a debt which God exacts from the creature; it was to facilitate the means of fulfilling this duty that He established in the Old Law sacrifices of thanksgiving, and in the New Law that of the Eucharist, meant to remind us of the marvels operated by Him for the love of us. Ingratitude is a sin which dries up the source of Grace; Jesus complained of it when of the ten lepers he saw only one return to express his gratitude.

If we pass on from the gratitude which the Saint showed towards God, to that which he had for men, this will reveal all the excellence of his heart. All will admit that he was worthy of great respect, but he never thought he deserved any at all, and therefore the least service rendered to him touched him deeply. If a child pointed out the way to him, if a Brother lit his lamp or did something even less troublesome for him, they were sure to be thanked heartily. It was considered a great privilege to be admitted to converse with him, yet it was always he who expressed the gratitude. "I thank you," he said sometimes, "that you did not despise my old age." And again: "I thank you for having had the patience to bear with me and to listen to me."

Gratitude was the only thing which could make him forget the rules he had laid down for himself.

One day he fell into a river and would have been drowned if a priest who accompanied him had not jumped into the water and saved him. This young Missioner, who was then full of fervour, lost it little by little, and in spite of all the efforts of St Vincent he even gave up his vocation and went home. However, there he found many unexpected contradictions; also documents which overwhelmed him with worry and bitterness for abandoning the state to which God had called him. The example of the Prodigal Son inspired him with the thought of returning to his Saintly Father and asking his pardon, which he did in several letters, in which he also asked to be readmitted into one of his Houses. St Vincent did not answer. Afflicted at this rebuff, the unfortunate priest redoubled his entreaties and pleaded that he would be lost eternally if the Saint refused to hold out a helping hand. St Vincent, who had small confidence in the conversion of such a fickle man, represented to him all the patience that had been shown him and the little account he had made of it; then he pointed out his fear that he would soon repent of his very repentance, and in conclusion he declared that he could not take him back. This stiff letter acted like a thunderclap on the priest, who, with one last effort, attacked St Vincent on his tenderest side—that is to say, through gratitude—and wrote to him: "Sir, I once saved your body, now save my soul." St Vincent could not refuse; his indebtedness to the young Missioner, the intense desire to practise virtue and the signs of repentance which the young man had shown

were sufficient; his decision was quickly made. He replied: "Come, sir, you will be received with open arms." Just at the moment in which the priest was starting back to the Mission house he fell seriously ill and died, happy, however, at having done all he could to repair his fault, and glad of having listened to the stings of remorse, which are often scorned during life, but which later afflict the soul with gloomy thoughts of despair at the hour of death.

Sometimes St Vincent seemed to go beyond the limits of his great generosity. One day he made a present of two thousand francs to a man who was in need, and who had rendered a service to one of his Houses. He took special care of a poor woman who had served two plague-stricken persons in the House of St Lazare at the time the Missioners settled there. He provided her with food and paid her rent for thirty years.

Not content with always showing his own personal gratitude in the best way he could, he wished that each one of his sons should consider as done to himself whatever was done to one of the Community. He heard one day that some Religious (Jesuits, from Bar) had, with tender brotherly spirit, buried one of his priests who died in their midst. At once he gave his Community a Spiritual Conference on the necessity of gratitude and urged his children to pray to God for these Religious that He might recompense them for their kindness.

The Saint evidently possessed the spirit of gratitude in an eminent degree.

PRACTICE.—*Three acts of charity to show our gratitude towards God, and when we receive some service from our neighbour let us be grateful, especially if the service is a spiritual one.*

TWENTY-FIRST DAY

RESPECT OF ST VINCENT FOR ECCLESIASTICS

ST VINCENT was full of love and respect for every grade of cleric, honouring Jesus Christ in the person of His Pastors, who represent Him upon earth. With regard to Bishops, no command was too hard for him to obey. He was in the habit of honouring in their person the Power and Majesty of Him Whose place they hold, refusing to consider anything in them except what deepened his respect for them in his eyes. He did not need solicitations nor prayers to induce him to serve them, and he was more active about their business than his own. He made use of his influence to lavish it in their service, never tiring of recommending their petitions to the Queen or the Cardinal Minister of State, or to the Chancellor and other influential magistrates. Indeed, all the Bishops of the time looked upon him as a good father and a true friend, ever ready to use his influence with the Government in everything they needed.

He also exhorted both clergy and people to have great respect for their sacred character, and he himself always received them as the angels and ambassadors of the living God. At every call he

would start at once, despite the great heat in summer, or the bitter cold of winter.

Indeed, he ever behaved towards Bishops as the docile servant of Scripture, who comes and goes even as he is commanded. His letters remain as a monument of respect for the Episcopal Order to all generations.

The other grades of clerics received the same respect from him. In truth, in his dealings with all men he was out to *do good to all, and to do harm to nobody*; but when there was question of Ministers of God he stretched this maxim to the furthest extent possible. Whoever was endowed with the sacerdotal character, or even simply wore the clerical dress, was sure of getting a favourable reception; some relief in his distress and a sympathetic hand ever ready to help. He placed out according to their aptitude those who brought suitable references for some employment, and would never allow any of his own to say evil of those of whom they could not say good. As for himself, he never used the pulpit to inveigh against the failings of pastors, for that would only make them embittered, without being converted, but rather against the disorders of the people, and this not by speaking of individuals, but as to a crowd, who feel less keenly the bitterness of reproaches when shared with so many others. A Missioner, who was more zealous than prudent, failed one day in observing this rule; St Vincent travelled about fifteen miles to go and ask pardon of certain ecclesiastics whom this preacher had treated rather

hardly. What union, what harmony there would be amongst the clergy to-day if all these maxims were never forgotten!

We must not think, however, that St Vincent, like another Elias, kept silence when he ought to have spoken. But he had learnt from St Francis de Sales that dealings with ecclesiastics require delicate tactfulness, and that, generally speaking, meekness is the first means to adopt. In fact, his charitableness in word and deed enabled him to make numerous conquests.

To obtain from him a favour one had no need of powerful protectors or of multiplied visits. This devoted friend of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ found in the sacerdotal character alone a motive to touch him.

A certain priest, who was unknown to him and sick, asked him for some help. St Vincent received him kindly, lodged him, fed him, gave him the remedies he needed and kept him until he was completely cured.

Another, who was making a Retreat at St Lazare, fell ill there. The Saint gave him every imaginable care; the sickness lasted a long time, but the charity was continued still longer. When the sick man was cured St Vincent gave him a soutane, a breviary, several other things and ten crowns to help him to live.

A third, who was obliged to go on a journey and had not the wherewithal, approached the Servant of God. St Vincent furnished all that was necessary, including shoes and twenty crowns.

His wonderful charity towards priests never failed, and after spending an enormous sum on ornaments, linen, sacred vessels, vestments, books and Church repairs he still thought he had not done enough. Moreover, there were few ecclesiastics in the kingdom of France who at his death did not come forward to give testimony to that lavish generosity which he always kept secret within himself. Joseph of old was regarded as the Saviour of Egypt, Mr. Vincent was regarded as the "Providence of the Curé" and of Priests in distress. When, in consequence of the bad times, their number was great, they were to be seen, one after another, directing their steps towards St Lazare. Those who could not go so far appealed to him from their distant provinces. Everywhere his name was loved, and his praises were on every lip.

A Missioner who was travelling through Champagne met, in some village, the Curé of the place, who asked him who he was. "I am a Missioner," replied the traveller. At these words the Curé fell on his neck, embraced him affectionately, took him to his house and told him of the great services, spiritual and temporal, which the Saint had rendered to the whole country; then he added, showing the soutane he was wearing: "*Hac veste me contexit*" ("He has covered me with this garment"), words which were spoken of St Martin by Our Lord Himself after He had appeared to him as a poor man and the Saint had given him half his cloak. More than two thousand ecclesiastics could have said the same of St Vincent.

PRACTICE.—*Let every faithful Christian strive to receive lovingly the Regulations of Ecclesiastical Superiors; and let us beware of imitating those who, because they have spent their whole life in making themselves expert on totally different matters, dare to pose as critics of the words or actions of ecclesiastical Authorities, thus showing their great ignorance together with their blasphemies. "Beware," says the Lord, "beware of touching the Sacred Ministers, either by act or by word* ("Nolite tangere Christos meos" (1 Chron. xvi. 22)), "*because, whatever is done or whatever is said against them, it is against Myself that it is done or said.*"

TWENTY-SECOND DAY

ATTACHMENT AND FILIAL SUBMISSION OF ST VINCENT TO THE SOVEREIGN PONTIFF

OUR Divine Lord, before going back to Heaven, willed to establish His Vicar upon earth, who, in quality of Supreme Head, should govern the Church by keeping all the faithful united together through the bonds of the same faith and the same obedience. Jesus prayed to His Father for this Unity on the eve of His Passion, saying to Him: "*And not for these only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me. That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou has sent Me*" (St John xvii. 21).

This end could not have been attained if God had not established one single Head and Judge, charged with the Infallible Definition of all controversies, and to Whom all must submit, according to the words of St Jerome: "*Propterea unus eligitur, ut capite constituto, schismatis tollatur occasio*" ("One alone is chosen, so that the authority of this single Head may remove all pretext for disputes or schism").

Thus in the Holy Gospel Jesus compares the

Church sometimes to a Kingdom, of which He confides the keys to St Peter—a symbol of the supreme power of governing and directing His subjects. Sometimes He likens it to a fold, of which St Peter is called the Shepherd of the sheep and the lambs—that is to say, the protector and guide of all, bishops and faithful alike. At other times to a house, of which St Peter is the foundation and the base, according to those words of His : " Thou art Peter, the Rock, and on this Rock I will build My Church." And He assures us that this rock will be so firm and immovable in supporting the Church that all the powers of hell shall not prevail against Her : " *Portæ inferi non prævalebunt adversus eam.*" So therefore, being built on this foundation, the supreme power vested in its visible Head is so necessary for the good government of the Church that it was not to die with St Peter, but that it would last for ever through his successors, according to the promise of Jesus Christ to be with them even to the consummation of the world : " *Ecce enim ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus, usque ad consummationem sæculi.*" As to the solemn pronouncements of the Sovereign Pontiff on matters of Faith and Morals, the Saviour has declared that he will be for ever preserved from error. " *I have prayed for thee, Peter,*" said Jesus Christ, " *that thy faith fail not ; and thou, when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*"

This is why all the Holy Fathers and General Councils have always professed what the General Council of Florence (at which East and West were

represented) has solemnly proclaimed, in these terms: "*We define that the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff possess the primacy over the whole Church; that the successor of Blessed Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is truly the Vicar of Jesus Christ and the Head of the whole Church; and that to him, in the person of Blessed Peter, has been confided the full power of tending, directing and governing the Universal Church.*" This doctrine was affirmed again by the Œcumenical Council of the Vatican in the solemn Definition of the Papal Infallibility.

Strong in these principles of our holy Faith, St Vincent always professed a singular veneration and a special attachment for the Roman Pontiff. He manifested these sentiments during the whole course of his long life, not only as a safeguard of his own personal faith, but also to preserve others from error and to bring wanderers back to the path of Truth.

He had made a journey to Rome in the first years of his priesthood. Thirty years later he still remembered with pleasure those happy days he had spent there, where is to be found the Centre of Catholicism, the Head of the Church Militant. There too lie the bodies of the two Princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, who preached there the Faith of Jesus Christ until death. And he used to say that this consideration had touched him so deeply as to cause an abundant flow of tears from his eyes.

He was sometimes heard to say to his Community, and to his friends: "From my youth I have always been terrified at the thought of finding

myself some day, without knowing it, enveloped in the errors of some new-fangled doctrine, and of seeing myself, like those who are in search of novelty, robbed of my faith and wrecked in infidelity. But," he added, "we have the Pope. He is the Oracle of Truth; if we remain faithful to His teachings we shall not lose our way. Let us beg God to give us simplicity and submission of judgment in accepting the decisions of the Sovereign Pontiffs; and let us ask Him to preserve us from the spirit of pride and the presumption of those who, having too high an idea of their own capabilities, refuse to submit themselves to the Sovereign Truth."

It seemed as if Providence wished to perfect and establish the faith of St Vincent still more. At that time new opinions were being spread throughout France by enthusiastic supporters. These opinions, under the pretence of interpreting the Fathers, and especially St Augustine, had for their aim, concealed with diabolical cleverness, to separate the faithful from the teaching and authority of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. These mischief-makers, under the cloak of friendship, often sought to insinuate their novelties into the mind of the Saint. St Vincent charged the most learned theologians to refute their systems by confronting them with contradictory propositions, which had been formulated by Councils or by the Popes. This was one means of forewarning those who might not have been sufficiently on their guard.

But the agitation went on increasing; the

enthusiasts spread their scandalous teaching in the schools, amongst families, and even threatened to contaminate Religious Houses. St Vincent, watching all this harm, approached several of the Bishops in France and begged them to come to some agreement with the other Bishops, and to lay the matter before the Apostolic See, so that such disorders might be more quickly and effectively remedied. Meanwhile, in order to prepare all Christians to base union of minds and hearts upon the Sovereign Pontiff alone, he circulated maxims such as the following by inserting them into his sermons :

" The Pope is the Head of the Church, with whom all the members must remain united. It is to Him we must have recourse to be reassured in our doubts and difficulties."

" In case of divergence and opposition of sentiments on religious matters there is no hope of re-establishing union, unless one refers to a third power, which in the absence of a General Council can be none other than the Pope."

" When the Sovereign Pontiff has pronounced upon any doctrine, there is no alternative but to submit our minds to his decision, and for all to unite in the one faith, with true and sincere obedience to the Head of the Church."

" Those who will not unite on these conditions can no longer hope for any union, because falsehood can never agree with truth ; there is nothing more to be done but pray for their conversion."

" It is by no means extraordinary that at the ancient Councils all did not always hold the same

opinion ; this fact proves once more how necessary it is that the Pope should be judge of controversies ; for, besides being the Vicar of Christ, he is the Head of the whole Church, and consequently the Superior of all Bishops."

" Holy prelates in past centuries were accustomed to have recourse to him, to ask his advice, especially when they were assembled together, as we see in the writings of the Holy Fathers and in the History of the Church."

" We must neither presume nor dread that his judgment may not be accepted ; should it happen so, it will only show which are the obstinate and which the true children of the Church."

Some apparently wished a General Council to be called, in order to have a more solemn judgment on the new opinions and so more easily bring back the wanderers to submission. But the Saint answered : " In the present state of affairs it is not advisable to assemble a General Council ; we know what time it would need to do that, and how long it took for the last one : the remedy would come too late for such a pressing evil. We must have immediate recourse to the Pope about this serious disorder, which is penetrating into families and cities and universities. It is a fire which is increasing every day, troubling minds and threatening the Church with irreparable desolation if a remedy is not quickly applied. And who would be capable of remedying it ? Certainly none else than the Holy See. The Council of Trent, in its last session, left to the Pope the care of settling whatever

difficulties would arise from their decrees. Now supposing that the Church were to find herself again forced into holding a General Council, as you wish, assembled according to Canon Law, as the last one was; and were the Holy Spirit to direct again this same Church, as no one can doubt, why could we not continue to follow the Light of this Holy Spirit, Who has shown already what is to be done on such occasions; that is to say, that we are to have recourse to the Sovereign Pontiff? To defer this recourse, would be to deprive a great number of learned and very pious persons of the merit of the obedience which they promised to pay to the Decrees of the Holy Father as soon as they should be published. Such persons desire naught but to know the truth."

The Bishops of France sanctioned, by their approbation and their praises, the projects of the Saint, who had no other end in view than to come to the aid of their zeal. They therefore addressed themselves to the Pope so that, as Universal Doctor of the Church, He might pass judgment upon the new doctrines and make known the Truth to those who had wandered from it. This step consoled St Vincent more than can be imagined, and his joy was supreme when Innocent X, in 1653, published and sent to Paris the Constitution by which he condemned the erroneous theories of the Jansenist Doctors, who had created such sad dissensions in France.

Scarcely had the Saint read the decisions of the Vicar of Jesus Christ than he took every care,

according to dictates of charity, to maintain purity of faith and Catholic doctrine among the members of his Congregation and all others. To this effect he often talked to them at the Community Conferences, to make them realize all the gratitude they owed to God for having preserved them from these false doctrines, which are capable of corrupting and ruining the entire Congregation. He also recommended them to send up to Heaven ardent prayers for the peace of the Church, for the extirpation of the new errors, and for the conversion of the unhappy people who had been infected by them. As to the books of the innovators, he persistently forbade the reading of them, as also the supporting, directly or indirectly, any opinion whatsoever which appeared to favour them; or, again, he forbade the slightest discussion with regard to the Pope's decisions.

After having thus provided for the preservation and safety of his own, he gave scope to his zeal so that a great number of Religious Communities might share the same advantages; and by his counsels and his charitable mediation he preserved them from the contagion of the condemned errors.

He did not forget those who had gone astray, visiting repeatedly for this purpose Superiors of Religious Communities and other persons of quality, even the most zealous partisans of the new doctrines. This was to entreat them all to strive with all their might to reconcile spirits, to lead the most perverse back to their obedience, especially by treating them with all possible respect and

charity. He himself held long private conversations with them, speaking to them unreservedly, and yet always showing them profound esteem and affection.

Towards the end of the year 1656 a new Constitution was published by Pope Alexander VII to conform and interpret more clearly that of Innocent X. St Vincent, still animated with the same zeal, began once more his visits and entreaties to those who had not yet submitted to the decision of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. There was a doctor at the Sorbonne who could not make up his mind to renounce the Jansenistic doctrines. The Constitution of Innocent X had staggered him, but, as to yielding full and entire submission, he could not agree to it. To help to free him of his hesitation and perplexity, St Vincent admitted him to the House of St Lazare to make a little Retreat. The doctor, after having listened to all the arguments put before him, declared he was resolved to retract his opinions on condition that the Sovereign Pontiff would clear up certain doubts which he still felt; and he laid them before the Holy Father in a letter that was stamped with Christian humility. St Vincent obtained a very gracious answer for him, the sweet influence of which at last mastered his doctrinal difficulties.

When, however, the Saint saw this man still wavering just because he was the slave of human respect, he said to him at last: "But, sir, what more do you want? Are you waiting for God to send you an angel to enlighten you? You need not

hope for it. He sent you back to the judgment of the Church, and the Church assembled at Trent sent you back to the judgment of the Holy See. Are you waiting for St Augustine to come back and explain it to you? Our Lord said once: 'If they do not believe the Scriptures, neither shall they believe One Who was risen from the dead.' And even if St Augustine himself were to come back to this earth he would have to submit again, just as he did before, to the judgment of the Sovereign Pontiff."

Such was his esteem, and such his immovable attachment to the Apostolic See. For him, as for St Cyprian, It was the sun placed by Jesus Christ in the centre of the world to enlighten all men with its rays, and to make them find in the Truth the Way which leads to Life.

It would be superfluous now to show how St Vincent was equally submissive to the Pope in things pertaining to ecclesiastical discipline; for he looked upon him as the Vicar of Jesus Christ and the Supreme Head of the whole Church, invested with full powers of governing, of leading forward or turning aside from poisonous pastures the flock of Jesus Christ. He could not fail to obey him in everything, with perfect submission of the understanding and of the will. Let it suffice to add that as long as the Saint lived he never ceased to urge his spiritual sons to practise the rule he left written in these terms: "We shall obey all our Superiors exactly, regarding each one of them in Our Lord, and Our Lord in them; so also

our Holy Father the Pope, whom we shall obey with all possible reverence, fidelity and sincerity."

PRACTICE.—*Resolve to obey diligently the commands of Holy Church, approving all that the Pope approves, condemning all that the Pope condemns.*

TWENTY-THIRD DAY

SPIRITUAL RETREATS ESTABLISHED BY ST VINCENT

WITH regard to Retreats, St Vincent carried out what nobody else had ever thought of attempting. The greatest saints of the last century must have groaned over the corruption prevailing in the bosom of Christianity. They indeed exhorted the faithful to weigh all their actions in the balance of Eternal Truth and to reflect seriously on Eternity, which is ever rapidly approaching. But it was reserved to St Vincent to procure for them in this regard, joys which were hitherto unknown, and to remove from the less fortunate (that is to say, the greater number) the real or imaginary pretexts behind which they usually concealed their negligence or their insensibility. For this it was necessary not only to provide Directors capable of touching their hearts by their discourses, and of directing them in the Holy Tribunal of penance, but it was necessary also to spare them expense. It is a strange fact that where pleasure is concerned expense does not seem to count, however considerable it may be; but it always seems excessive directly there is question of eternal salvation.

This reflection inspired St Vincent with the

thought of sharing his house, his furniture, all that he had, with those who would profit by it to become reconciled with God. Like the father of the family of which the Gospel speaks, he compelled the good and the bad to sit at his table. All the recompense he asked for was that the good should better themselves still more, and that those who were not should make every effort to become so.

Such disinterestedness was soon reported throughout Paris and the Province, and in a few months St Lazare was receiving a larger number of guests than ever. It was a touching sight to see, in the same refectory, noblemen of highest rank sitting with the lowest among the people; laymen at the side of those in the bonds of Holy Orders; magistrates and simple artisans; masters and servants; old men eager to come and weep over their past, and young people coming to seek means of preservation for the future. To sustain an enterprise of this kind and to obtain all the fruit it should produce, certainly a big heart was needed, and great enlightenment.

Such was the outline of St Vincent's plan; but it had to be carried out in such a way as to be useful to those who made the Retreat, and to be transmitted from age to age, even to his last successors. He therefore strove to make them all appreciate the grace that God was putting in their reach. He represented to the "exercitants" that the sole aim of the Retreat is to destroy the reign of sin, to reform man entirely, to renew his interior life, to open his eyes to the duties of his state and to his

personal obligations, and finally to establish him solidly in a state of true Charity which unites his heart and all the powers of his soul to God, so that he can in all truth cry out with the Apostle: "*It is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ lives within me.*"

In order to neglect nothing that might contribute to the success of the Retreats the Servant of God wished that the priests to whom he confided their direction should take as the subject of their sermons, not those which are pleasing to the soul or the imagination, but the great Truths of salvation; in a word, those which a good Christian should never forget, and cannot recall without becoming better.

Thus, the end for which God created us, the graces received, the great lessons which Jesus Christ, His Son, has given us; the helps He has prepared for us in the Sacraments, the dispositions necessary for approaching them; the horror of sin, its fatal consequences, the vanity of the world and of its opinions, the illusions of our own mind; the temptations of the flesh, the malice and artifice of the old serpent, the shortness of life, the uncertainty of the moment of death, the dreadful judgments of God, the happy or miserable eternity—these and other similar ones are the truths which he imposed on the Directors of the Retreats, and which still to-day form the subject of sermons and meditation during the spiritual exercises. By this means those making the Retreat are effectually disposed to examine the state of their conscience, to make a good general confession, or, if it has been made, to

render their conscience more perfect by a review of what may have been defective in the past; to take to oneself a Rule of Life from which one is not to deviate without absolute necessity; and, above all, to form strong resolutions to avoid evil, and to do good.

Fearing that after his death the Priests of the Congregation, being overburdened with labour and worried by so much expense on behalf of these gratuitous Retreats, might let their zeal cool down little by little, the Saint tried to forewarn them against this kind of temptation. He represented to them therefore that their house had formerly been a refuge for lepers, of whom none were cured, but that henceforth it would receive persons attacked by a leprosy far more dangerous than that of the body; or, to speak more correctly, *dead* persons, of whom a great number would recover health as well as life through the Divine Mercy. For, with regard to sinners, Our Lord operated every day the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus, and therefore it was a great privilege for the Priests to be the chosen instruments of these stupendous resurrections. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "what a shame if this place, which is now like a health-giving pool of Bethsaida, where so many come to bathe in the hope of recovery, should one day become a corrupted cistern through the relaxation and laziness of those who dwell there! Let us pray to God that such a thing may never happen. Let us pray to the Blessed Virgin that She may prevent it by Her intercession, and by the desire She has for the

conversion of sinners. Let us pray to the great friend of the Son of God, St Lazare, that it may please him to be ever the protector of this house, and that he may obtain for it the grace of perseverance in the good begun."

St Vincent reminded his Missioners of the good effects of Retreats, which they themselves had witnessed, encouraging them to consider neither the trouble nor the expense. But with regard to this, his example was more eloquent than his words. He increased the number of admissions for Retreat, and the more he advanced in age the more lavish he became in his generosity, which is rare in old age. Indeed his charity knew no bounds; he extended it so far that, in the end, he admitted to the spiritual exercises all those for whom he could find room. From certain calculations made we know that during the last twenty-five years of his life more than twenty thousand persons made their Retreat in his house; that is to say, over eight hundred every year. It is true that a certain number paid their expenses altogether, or partly, but most of the rest could give nothing.

It is not rare to meet with virtuous persons who hold different opinions about such or such a thing. Thus several Missioners found his charity excessive. A Brother who had charge of the expenses said to him one day: "By going on in this way the House will break down, because you admit too many to make the Retreat." The holy man replied: "My Brother, I do it because these people want to be saved."

Another represented to him that amongst this multitude of exercitants there were a certain number who had no thought of profiting by it, being far more attracted by the good food for the body than by that for the soul. But the worthy imitator of the Charity of Jesus Christ replied that, in the eyes of faith and religion, it was already a great advantage that a certain number of exercitants derived all possible profit from the exercises; that the fact of feeding a needy man is in itself an alms always very pleasing to God; that, if we were to be too difficult about admitting those who presented themselves, we should run the danger of repulsing some upon whom the Holy Spirit had merciful designs; and that by wishing to scrutinize all their intentions we might stifle in many of them the first inspirations of grace, hidden behind human and material considerations. His explanations on this point were so explicit that one easily perceived it was a breath from on High urging him, or rather sweeping him, along that path.

Doubtless such a burdensome undertaking was the occasion of enormous sacrifices for the Saint, but we must remember that even in this world he was recompensed a hundredfold. As soon as his Congregation began to extend, all those Houses, which possessed the necessary means, established Retreats like those held in St Lazare in Paris.

He was able himself to verify the incalculable good they produced everywhere. A wonderful number of letters came to congratulate him on the blessings which God granted to his zeal. Priests, Curés,

Bishops, Cardinals, all thanked him for making easy for them this practice which sanctified pastors and people. The Spiritual Exercises of St Lazare were started in a good number of dioceses. Some prelates who formerly, whilst simple ecclesiastics, had placed themselves under the direction of St Vincent and been sanctified by the Retreats, undertook to sanctify their clergy by the same means. One of them wrote one day to the Servant of God that at that time he had thirty priests in his Episcopal House making their Retreat, with much fruit.

Not alone in France, but in Italy also, the Hand of God was with the Missioners. Cardinal Durazzo, whose zeal was an honour to the Roman purple, had no sooner established the Priests of the Mission in the town of Genoa, of which he was Archbishop, than he asked if these Missioners would do as much good with regard to his clergy as they had done in the country for his flock. The results were prodigious. The spirit of humility and of compunction were shown by so many signs that it became difficult to moderate their transports. One of the Gentlemen of St Lazare said on this occasion : " We are here in the valley of Jehoshaphat ; each one is acknowledging his miseries. Blessed are those who, having sought this confusion before death, may be prepared to escape that of the great day of the Lord." Cardinal Durazzo, who could scarcely believe his eyes, could not restrain his tears. He thanked a thousand times over the prime mover of so much good and those who served as his fitting instruments.

All this success made the Saint inflexible in his resolution of permitting no change in his House with regard to the Retreats. The misfortunes of the time have never affected the practice of this work of charity.

PRACTICE.—*Let us resolve to make a good Retreat this year. If our occupations will not allow of this, let us employ at least one day to put the affairs of our conscience in the state in which we should like to find them at the hour of our death.*

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY

SIMPLICITY OF ST VINCENT

OUR Divine Saviour, when sending His Apostles to preach the Gospel, said to them: "*Be simple as doves, and prudent as serpents.*" It was in this school that St Vincent learnt that marvellous simplicity which won for him the affection of the ignorant, and the respect of the wise men of his time. "Mr. Vincent," said Bossuet, "was a man of admirable simplicity."

Indeed he always had a horror of equivocal phrases, those ways of hiding one's thoughts, those crooked ways, so to speak, which even those who condemn them in theory do not scruple to employ to get themselves out of a difficulty. If some proposal was put before him which did not seem strictly conformed to justice, he said, with a friendly frankness, that he could not carry it out. If it happened that, after taking charge of some business, he became distracted by more pressing occupations and forgot about it, in all simplicity, and at the same time with humility, he owned that *he had thought no more about it, so great was his weakness and misery.* If they came to thank him for some favour he had helped to obtain he told them candidly what he had

done to bring it about. In a word, if he did not always tell the whole truth it was because it is part of the virtue of prudence to keep silence about some truths, but he never said one word that was in the slightest degree contrary to the truth. In recommending simplicity to his own sons he was unconsciously drawing a portrait of himself.

St Vincent said in substance that simplicity is a gift which steers us straight to God, Who is Truth, without affectation, without pretence, without human respect, without an eye to personal advantage. A simple man has only God in view, and wishes to please Him only. He does not say what is contrary to his convictions; in his actions he does not in any way infringe the rules of candour and Christian uprightness. If at times he does not manifest all his thoughts it is because simplicity is a "discreet virtue which is never contrary to prudence," but is careful to avoid in his speech all that might make the neighbour believe that he has anything in mind or heart which is reality is not there.

Simplicity in the instructions that were meant for the people was a point on which he often insisted. His letters and conferences prove his anxiety in this regard, and he continually feared lest any of his children should deviate from this in order to acquire a reputation for eloquence, as certain preachers do by pompous discourses. He commanded them to banish from their sermons all that savoured in the slightest degree of what is called the spirit of the world, affectation or vanity.

Amongst the numerous reasons he put forward in favour of simplicity we select the following: "Just as natural beauty is far more attractive than artificial or painted imitations, so simple and ordinary sermons are better received and impress minds more forcibly than those which are affected and artificially polished."

"Study to preach," he said, "as Jesus Christ did. This Divine Saviour was able, had He so willed, to say marvellous things about our highest Mysteries, with thoughts and expressions suitable to them, He being the Word and Wisdom of the Eternal Father; and yet we know in what simple and humble manner He preached, levelling Himself to the minds of the people and giving to us the model how to discourse on His holy Word."

He said another time: "Our Lord, when sending His Apostles to preach the Gospel through all the world, recommended this virtue of simplicity especially to them. It is most important and necessary to draw down Graces from Heaven upon the people to dispose their minds to listen to the Gospel and to accept it. Now, it was not only to His Apostles He was speaking, but, in general, to all those whom Providence destined for the preaching of the Gospel, and the instruction and conversion of souls. Now, Gentlemen, you must apply this to yourselves. God takes pleasure in conversing with the simple: '*Cum simplicibus sermocinatio eius.*' He walks with them and makes them go forward in all security. Indeed it is only the simple who are chosen to be instructed in the School of Our

Lord. His doctrine remains obscure to the wise and prudent of this world, as He Himself declares, but it is revealed to little ones: *Confiteor Tibi Pater, quia abscondisti hæc a sapientibus et prudentibus, et revelasti ea parvulis.* It is certainly the case that the religious spirit is more usually found amongst the simple than amongst the great persons of the world."

When sending a Missioner once to a country that was famed for its craftiness he gave him this advice: "You are going to a country where it is said the inhabitants are mostly cunning and deceitful. Now, if this be the case, the best way of helping them is to act with great simplicity, for the maxims of the Gospel are entirely opposed to the ways of the world. And as you are going in the service of Our Lord you must also behave according to His Spirit, which is a Spirit of uprightness and simplicity."

The Missioner regulated his conduct on this very wise advice, and the populace, charmed by his candour, offered a magnificent establishment to the Saint. St Vincent accepted it because there was good to be done there. The first Superior he sent to this place was a priest endowed with great ability united with perfect simplicity.

Nothing could better express the delicacy of the Saint on this point than the following letter. It is an answer to one of his own priests, who had opened his whole heart to him: "I thank you for your letter, and for your gracious gift. Your heart is too good to be placed in such bad hands as mine; and I know well enough that you offer it to me

that I may give it back to Our Lord, to Whom it belongs and to Whose Love you desire it should always tend. May your loving heart henceforth belong solely to Jesus Christ, and belong to Him entirely, for time and for eternity. Pray to Him, I conjure you, that He may give me a little of the Candour and Simplicity of His Heart. These are the virtues which I greatly need, and the excellence of which surpasses our understanding."

PRACTICE.—*In our words and in our relations with our neighbour let us carefully avoid all that would not be conformed to the exact truth. Besides the offence to God, it offends against ordinary decency and disgraces a man in the sight of all.*

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

THE Lord tells us that he who hopes in Him shall not be put to shame; and St Paul said that, if of himself he was capable of nothing, with the help of God he could do all things: *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.* Strengthened by this confidence in God, St Vincent undertook things which mighty kings would not have dared to attempt, and he succeeded in undertakings which seemed to be condemned to failure.

The Providence of God was his whole support, and God, ever faithful to His promises, never abandoned him. If some affair turned up which he recognized as being willed by God, he used all possible means to make it succeed, but not as many others do, agitating themselves, and annoying all whom they meet. The philosophy of the man of God was calmer, for it was inspired from on high; he allowed God to act and awaited from Him the moment and measure of success.

If it was represented to him, through reasons of human prudence, that there was no hope of carrying out some enterprise which he had begun, he answered: "Let us leave our Lord to act; it is

His work; and as He was pleased to begin it let us hold it for certain that He will finish it in the way that will be most pleasing to Himself. Let us therefore be of good courage; let us confide in our Lord, Who will be our assistant and our leader in a work which He Himself has called us to undertake."

When the thing was once begun, convinced that the thought of it had come from God, and that God desired him to do it, then neither expense nor labour nor any difficulty whatever could frighten him; on the contrary, obstacles only increased his courage. For example, it was represented to him numerous times that the great expense of feeding so many people, who came every week to make a Retreat at St Lazare, was threatening his House with ruin; he just answered: "*The treasures of Divine Providence are inexhaustible; mistrust lessens the honour due to God; riches portend a far greater ruin to this Congregation than poverty could ever do.*"

One day, on the eve of an Ordination, the Procurator came to tell him that he had not a single halfpenny left for the daily expenses: "Ah! what excellent news!" exclaimed St Vincent; "may God be praised! This is the time to show whether we have confidence in God." He answered in much the same terms a parliamentary lawyer who, happening to be making a Retreat at St Lazare, and being surprised to see so many people in the refectory, asked St Vincent where he found the means to feed such a crowd of inmates and guests.

We must not think that God worked miracles continually in favour of St Vincent, or that He

always hastened at the critical moment to help him in his needs. St Vincent was sometimes reduced to eating nothing but bread, made of barley or oats, with his sons, but he regarded these passing miseries as trials to deepen their faith in the Order of Providence.

The confidence which animated the Servant of God in times of scarcity strengthened him also in other afflictions which came upon him and on his children. He was so convinced that confidence in God must be one of the principal virtues of a Missioner that he made it the subject of a certain number of Spiritual Conferences. He liked to quote the example of Abraham, who, according to Divine promise, was to people the whole earth through a son, given him by God, but whom he was nevertheless ordered to immolate. "Admire his confidence," he said; "he is in no way put about by what will happen; he hopes that all will go well, since God is arranging it. Why, Gentlemen, should we not have the same hope, if we just leave to God the care of all that concerns us and prefer whatever He commands us?" On another occasion he said: "Should we not have good reason to hope that God will furnish us with all that will be necessary for us when we see that the birds of the air neither sow nor spin nor gather any harvest? But God takes care of them everywhere; He gives them food and shelter. He even extends His Providence to the grass upon the ground and to the lilies of the field, which are so magnificently clothed that even Solomon in all his glory had nothing like to them.

Now, if God thus provides for the beasts of the field and for the plants of the earth, why should you not trust in Him, Who is so good and so powerful? How is it that you would rather depend on your own industry than on His Goodness?"

St Vincent also recommended this same confidence in God to the Daughters of Charity, who, being more exposed to danger, are even still more specially bound to mistrust themselves and confide much in God. He promised them God's help with so much assurance that he seemed to have some mysterious reason for counting upon a special Providence over them. God had already made known that He watched over these virtuous Daughters. On one occasion, when one of them was found safe and sound in the midst of a building in ruins, St Vincent said to them: "Ah, my Daughters, see what reason you have to confide in God! We read in history that a man, when walking out in the open country, was killed by the fall of a tortoise which an eagle dropped upon his head; and here to-day we see houses thrown down from top to bottom and the Daughters of Charity coming out from the ruins safe and sound, without receiving any injury. What is that if not a sign and a proof that God wants you to know that you are dear to Him? . . . Oh, my Daughters, be certain that so long as you keep this holy confidence in your hearts God will watch over you and keep you safe wherever you may be."

St Vincent one day gave a reprimand to a person

who, believing that her presence was necessary for the existence of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity, had expressed some anxiety about the sickness with which she was attacked: "Oh, woman of little faith, why have you not more confidence in the conduct and the example of Jesus Christ? The Saviour of the world depended on God His Father for the future of the whole Church, and you think that He is going to fail you in managing a handful of girls whom He Himself has obviously gathered together and brought to you."

This mighty confidence in God was also useful to him in restoring peace to those who were tempted to despair. A person of high rank, being in a distressing state of soul, asked him for a remedy to cure the evil which was tormenting him. The Saint answered that "*God does not always allow His own to discern the purity of their interior state in the midst of the movements of corrupt nature, so that they may humble themselves without ceasing, and that their treasure, being thus hidden, may be all the safer.* The great Apostle had seen the marvels of Heaven, but he did not consider himself justified for this reason, because he saw in himself too much darkness and too many combats. Nevertheless, he had such confidence in God that he believed there was nothing in the world capable of separating him from the Charity of Jesus Christ. This example should be sufficient, sir, to make you remain in peace in the midst of your obscurities, and to give you entire and perfect confidence in the Infinite Good-

ness of Our Lord, Who, desiring to complete the work of your sanctification, invites you to abandon yourself into the Hands of His Providence."

PRACTICE.—*Confidence in God does not exclude our co-operation; let us therefore do all that we can on our part, and the Lord, in His Goodness, will do the rest which we are not able to accomplish. Make a visit to the Most Holy Sacrament.*

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY

GENERAL CONDUCT OF ST VINCENT

TWO objects filled up the whole life of St Vincent: his own sanctification, and that of his neighbour. He began by sanctifying himself, and did not forget others; for he knew that the Ministry of Jesus Christ must produce fruits. His manner of acting in this sacred ministry deserves indeed that we should set forth its principal fruits.

All his actions bore the seal of extraordinary wisdom. A man through whose hands so many important affairs had passed would have had the right, at any rate in his old age, to depend somewhat on his experiences. But St Vincent seemed to be the only one who was ignorant of the great accuracy of his mind, the vastness of his capabilities, the wisdom of the measures which he adopted. In the decline of life he was as timid and as reserved as he had been at the age of forty. He undertook nothing without having recourse to God by fervent prayer; he listened willingly to others and gladly followed their advice. That law which the Saint had imposed on himself, of deliberating, of consulting and stopping to weigh always the "for" and "against," caused some delay occasionally in his decisions;

but once they were taken it became impossible to change anything. The thought of abandoning a project which had been wisely planned seemed to him to be a temptation. God could not complain of a man who could answer Him: "*Lord, I recommended this affair to Thee, I took advice; what else could I do in order to know Thy Will?*"

Prudence was another of his grand qualities. He was the declared enemy of everything resembling presumption; and it displeased him to be pressed to give an answer without having a little time to reflect on what had been proposed to him. When the force of circumstances obliged him to give his opinion without delay, he began by imploring help from on high, and usually gave no solution that was not based on Holy Scripture, or on some action of Our Lord. It is a fact that he always managed to find some texts which had connection with the object upon which he was consulted. The fear of burdening his conscience with others people's faults, or of being mistaken in carrying out the designs of God, made him very circumspect when there was question of persuading a person to accept a particular office. He certainly had very great powers over his children, but he would never take upon himself alone to choose anyone for far-away missions.

For extraordinary missions he only chose those of his subjects whom God had inspired with the desire of making this great sacrifice of themselves. The privilege of bidding farewell for good to their family and to their dearest friends was only granted

to those who had begged for it persistently for a long time. The Saint thought, rightly, that a man who showed signs of a special call by God produced more fruit by himself alone than many others whose vocation is less free from other human motives, and consequently less pure.

This wise prudence did not, however, degenerate into weakness nor soft condescension. On the contrary, St Vincent said that " the ill success of a war was generally put down to a blundering of the generals; thus the faults of a Community usually come from the failings of the Superior. The worst Superiors are those who, in order to please their companions and make themselves popular, pretend not to see things and let everything go just as it pleases." He said also that he had seen a Community—one of the most regular Communities in the whole world—fall away in less than four years through the carelessness and cowardice of a Superior. Therefore he concluded, if the welfare of a Community depends upon Superiors, certainly we must pray much to God for them, as having charge and having to render an account of all those who are under their care.

This firmness of the Saint extended to all points of Rule, and it was not only in the Houses of the Congregation that he desired to see them observed inviolably, but, as far as possible, on the Missions also, and even on a journey. To supplement what was absolutely too difficult to fulfil outside Community life he prescribed other practices. If several of his priests were travelling together, one was

always put in charge so as to direct the others and to take care that the Rules should be observed.

The strictness of the Saint was neither morose nor haughty. Being severe only to himself, he was kindness itself towards others, and strove to please them in everything they could reasonably expect of him. If he had to refuse anything it always cost him much pain, and he did so not because he wanted to assert his authority, but because it was impossible for him to grant it. He explained the motives of his refusal, and whenever these motives ceased to exist he invariably remembered the request made and gave leave to carry it out. "If he was obliged to give an order," relates one of his own priests, "he always did it politely, without using the least tone of command, or any words that might arouse the idea of asserting his authority; it was always by way of request: '*I beg you, sir, to do such or such a thing.*' If he were starting on a journey or returning from one, I felt quite struck by the affection of his farewell and the cordiality of his greetings. His words were always full of a sort of spiritual sweetness which was so powerful that, without the slightest feeling of resistance, one felt inclined to execute his orders."

The delicate way he had of penetrating into the very depths of even a heart hardened by sorrow was most powerful in imparting new courage. "I compassionate the pains you are suffering," he wrote to a discouraged Superior who was employed by him; "but you must not be surprised at these difficulties, and still less allow yourself to

be depressed by them, for one meets with them everywhere. It is quite enough for two men to live together for them to become a trial to one another; and even if you lived alone you would be a burden to yourself, and you would find something in yourself with which to exercise your patience; so true it is that our miserable life is full of crosses! I praise God for the good use you are making of yours, as I believe is the case. I am too well acquainted with the wisdom and meekness of your spirit to think that they would fail you on these trying occasions. If you cannot please everybody you must not be troubled about that, for Our Lord Himself did not." The needs of the Company having obliged him to separate two priests who were working in peace together, he wrote to one of them: "I do not doubt that it is painful for you to be separated from this dear and faithful friend, but remember that Our Lord was separated from His own Mother, and that His disciples, who were so perfectly united amongst themselves through the Holy Spirit, had to become separated for the service of their Divine Master." In fine, it was impossible for his children to be tried by any affliction without his suffering even more than they did.

Being convinced that a Superior can only reasonably require from others what he first practises himself, St Vincent assisted regularly at all those Community exercises which cost most, and especially the morning meditation. His perfect regularity authorized him to expect the same from his inferiors. And he was specially strict on this point towards

those to whom he gave the charge of directing others. "*Præsint ut prosint*" ("They are at the head in order to be useful"). He said that "*those who keep no rule and are not exemplary fail in an essential quality for governing; a man, however gifted in other ways with the talent of directing others, lacks what is necessary for the Superior of a House, or the Director of a Seminary, if he is not diligent in following the Spiritual Exercises or keeping the Rule.*"

In order to render his Direction profitable to all of whom he had charge he strove from the very beginning to destroy sin in them, and all that might lead to it. For this end he established an *Intern Seminary*, which he made a school of virtue, in which the pupils, of all ages, who were admitted found in the Spiritual Exercises a sure means of destroying the old man and becoming new creatures in Jesus Christ.

Disobedience was the fault he found most unpardonable in a Seminarist; if he did not correct himself he was sent away, whatever other qualities he might possess. According to our Saint, a man who is too much attached to his own will is an enemy of that childlike simplicity extolled in the Gospel, which alone gives a right to the Kingdom of Heaven; such a man is incapable of the holy abnegation which must be the prime virtue of a disciple of Our Lord.

On leaving the Seminary he sent to study theology and philosophy those who still needed to work up these subjects. The masters he gave them were such as would keep up their fervour as well as

teach them their science. Nothing was more painful to St Vincent than to see a young man decreasing in fervour in proportion as he increased in knowledge, or losing his time in useless speculations which would only feed curiosity. He said: "*Just as a glass which is passed from the heat of the furnace into a cold place runs the risk of being shattered to pieces, so a young man who passes from a place of recollection, vigilance and prayer into the tumult of a class runs the risk of getting deranged.*" He desired that all the Missioners should have all the learning of St Thomas, "*but on condition they should also have the humility of this holy Doctor. Pride means the downfall of the greatest of geniuses, as it was of the Angels; and knowledge without humility has at all times been pernicious to the Church.*"

The conclusion of his advice was that the young should prepare themselves well to serve their neighbour, because there were too few workers, while the country folk were losing their souls for want of instruction.

PRACTICE.—*If we have learning without humility we shall never be the Children of God, but rather the sons of the father of pride; that is to say, of the devil. A* Pater *and an* Ave *to St Vincent, that he may help us to follow his example.*

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY

MISSIONS OF ST VINCENT

MISSIONS are public exercises in which, by means of simple but vigorous and effective instructions, one strives to lead the people to weep over their sins, to make good their mistakes by sincere repentance and to live in future in a holy manner. To produce good results these exercises require a certain order, certain and precautions with regard to the Pastors whose place in a sense the Missioners hold for the time being ; with regard to the people, who must be instructed without fatiguing them too much ; with regard to the evangelical workers themselves, who, if they are to sanctify others, have need of zeal and charity, or rather of all the virtues. St Vincent conceived the plan of his Missions in such a way as to satisfy all these various obligations.

With regard to the Pastors, besides the permission of the Bishop, which is always indispensable, he never settled anything without the consent of the Parish Priests.

As soon as a Parish Priest has given permission for a Mission in his parish, one of the Missioners opens it and announces in a sermon the visit of

Mercy which God is preparing for His people, the multitude of graces which He is ready to shed upon all those who will render themselves worthy of them by being converted to Him; the unhappiness of those who refuse to listen to His voice, and the necessity of immediately breaking the chains of sin. A few days later the Missioners present themselves at the appointed place and settle down to the work at once. Every day they give three public instructions: one is given very early in the morning, so that the people may not lose a moment from their work; at one o'clock there is catechism for the children, and in the evening, after sunset, a more thorough instruction for adults.

The preaching at the Mission must be solid but plain. All metaphysical ideas must be banished, as those learned discussions serve no other purpose than to flatter the talent of him who is speaking. Here is a list of the most ordinary subjects of these sermons: the importance of eternal salvation, the last things, contrition, the forgiveness of injuries, restitution, the enormity of sin, hardness of heart, final impenitence, false shame, relapse, calumny, envy, intemperance and such other disorders which find their way more easily in country places; the good use of poverty and afflictions, the sanctification of Sundays and Feasts, the necessity of prayer; methods of praying, of approaching the Sacraments, of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; the Imitation of Our Lord, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the happiness of perseverance—in a word, all that a Christian must do to go to God, all that

he must avoid in order to be happier after death than he can ever be during life.

Catechism has for its object the explanation of the principal articles of faith and the most essential truths of religion. At Catechism are treated: the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, of the Incarnation of the Son of God, of the price of our Redemption; of the Commandments of God and of the Church, of the Sacraments, of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and of the Angelus. The number of subjects is regulated by the length of the Mission, and the choice of them by the degree of intelligence amongst the audience. Each one who has laboured for the salvation of these souls should be able to say, when leaving them, what St Paul said to the faithful of Mileta: "*I call you to witness that I am innocent of your perdition; I have done all that depended on me to prevent it.*"

The other Instruction, which is given from the pulpit, is intended for adults; for this reason a special one is arranged for the children. From the very first day they are invited in a homely Instruction to come regularly. Then in the following Instructions they are given the admonitions they need, speaking to them in a manner suitable to their understanding; deducing from the principles of faith those consequences likely to form or reform their manners; encouraging them with the thought of the recompense which will be the prize for their wisdom or their diligence. This important exercise finished with sacred hymns. Piety gained doubly thereby; for thus Christian Doctrine was taught

in a pleasant way, and holy hymns made people forget dangerous songs.

As soon as the people appeared to be somewhat touched by the truths they heard, the priest installed himself in the confessional, where he had to spend some hours each day, morning and evening. Then came the visiting to console the sick, to win back hardened sinners, to extinguish feuds between families, to reconcile enemies, to teach schoolmasters and mistresses how to fulfil well their duties, to establish Associations of Charity to help the poor; in a word, to prevent evil and to do all the good that is possible—such was the end that the Founder of the Mission proposed to himself, and which he attained during the course of his life.

When the adults had received the most pressing attention which their state required, then those children were prepared for First Communion who were judged capable of receiving it profitably. Besides all the help that was given to their children throughout the Mission, on the eve of the great day of their First Communion an ardent, tender exhortation was given them, suitably fitted for preparing these young hearts to receive worthily the Lamb of God. The next day a little *ferverino* would be given immediately before Holy Communion. That day, calculated to stir up the most tepid soul to Faith and Love, is usually fixed for the closing of the Mission. A solemn Procession of Thanksgiving brings the Mission to an end. The youngest children, who, though not thought capable of receiving Holy Communion, were un-

fortunately already too capable of offending God, have also their share in the fruits of the Mission. They too are instilled with a holy horror of sin; they are taught to behave modestly in the Church; to conceive regret for their faults; and, not being able for more, they are prepared for making their first confession with sincerity and confidence.

With regard to the Missioners, St Vincent required of them a lively faith and perfect confidence in God, so that they may not let themselves be held back by the contradictions which are frequently met with in this holy Ministry. Mortification too was expected of them under all trials, to bear the fatigue of the Mission, the inconveniences of the lodging, the inclemency of the weather. So also, invincible patience to bear with the incivility of those who should be the principal object of their care; simplicity, accompanied by prudence, in instructing them and bringing them to God; great indifference with regard to employments, places, times and persons, so as to have no other will than that of God; finally, a profound humility and invincible meekness, especially in their dealings with heretics.

We shall finish this chapter by an analysis of one of St Vincent's discourses to his Priests on the necessity of giving Missions. After having declared with St Paul that each one must walk worthily of his own vocation, he remarked that Missions were the principal rôle of his Congregation, the work of the Seminaries and the Ordinandi having no other aim but to prepare priests who were capable of

preserving the good results of these Missions in the parishes. For this purpose he quoted to them the example of warriors who, after having seized a fortress, left a garrison there. He asked them to stir themselves up and give good Missions, remembering that it is God Who says to each one of them: "Go forth, you Missioners; go wherever I send you. Here are poor souls waiting for you whose salvation depends so much on your sermons and catechisms. . . ." But what shall we answer to God if it should happen that, through our fault, some one or other of these poor souls were to die unconverted and be lost? Should we not have reason to reproach ourselves for being in some way the cause of their damnation through not having helped them as we might have done? And should we not fear that He might ask of us an account of this neglect at the hour of our death? On the other hand, if we fulfil faithfully the obligations of our vocation, shall we not have reason to hope that God will lavish His Graces upon us day by day, that He will increase vocations to our Company more and more and will give to it men of suitable dispositions who would act in His Spirit and so bless all our labours? Besides, all those souls who will obtain their eternal salvation through our ministry will be like so many witnesses of our fidelity to our duties before the Throne of God.

After having concluded from the Gospel text "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*" that the salvation of the poor was one of the principal occupations of Our Lord, St Vincent explained to his

Priests how dangerous it would be for them to abandon these members of Jesus Christ, as precious in the Eyes of God as they seemed contemptible to the world. Then he applied to them those words of St Ambrose, "*Si non pavisti occidisti*" ("If you have not fed them you have killed them"), words "*which, though actually meant for corporal refection, can still be applied to those who are spiritually starved, with just as much truth, and perhaps a greater reason. Consider then how justly we should tremble if we were to fail on this point; or if perhaps on account of age, or indeed under pretext of infirmity or indisposition, we should begin to slacken . . . forgetting that God has placed in our hands the salvation of the poor, and that we had undertaken the responsibility in His Sight.*"

The Saint then put forward an objection in favour of those who take too much care of their health, viz., *that the labour of the Missions may shorten their days.* But the holy Priest, like St Paul, was desirous of one thing only, namely, death, in order to be more quickly united to Jesus Christ. So he answered the objection thus: "What! is it a misfortune for him who is travelling in a foreign land to hasten his journey and get nearer home? . . . Can it be a misfortune for a faithful soul to go and see and possess its God? Is it a fearful mishap for Missioners to receive without delay the glory which their Divine Master has prepared for them by His sufferings and through His death? What! are we to be afraid of that happening which we could not desire too strongly, nay, pine away because of its long delay in coming?

"Now, what I say here to the Priests I say also to those who are not Priests. . . . No, my Brothers, do not think that because you are not employed in preaching that therefore you are exempted from the obligation we are under of working for the salvation of the poor; for you can do it in your own way. You are obliged thereto, being members of one and the same body with us and members of the Sacred Body of Jesus Christ. Each one co-operates in his own way in the work of our Redemption; for, as the Head of Jesus Christ was pierced with thorns, the Feet were also pierced with nails which attached Him to the Cross; and if, after the Resurrection, this Head was rewarded, the Feet have also shared in that Reward."

He was only obeying a Divine Call in preaching, for he said, as for himself, he would have been very happy to end his days under a bush, or as a labourer in some village.

A good number of ecclesiastics, who were noted for their learning, their piety, even for their noble birth, being attracted by his example, associated themselves in his labours. "Who can calculate," exclaimed the author of his Life, "the amount of good which resulted from these Missions for the Glory of God and the advantage of the Church? Who could tell the number of persons living in culpable ignorance of the things necessary for salvation, who became enlightened on these truths, which they were bound to know? How many others, whose life was stagnating in vice, were freed by good general confessions? What hatreds

have been completely uprooted! what cruel usury abandoned! How many the restitutions made! what scandals removed! And, on the other hand, what religious practices and charitable works established there, where the very words *Religion* and *Charity* seemed to be unknown! What alms bestowed by persons who hitherto seemed inaccessible to compassion! Consider then the number of souls sanctified, who, instead of enjoying the glory of Heaven, would be to-day amongst the devils in the abyss of hell!"

PRACTICE.—*Let us never fail in going to hear a sermon on Sundays and Feast days. If unable, then let us recite five* Paters *and five* Aves *in honour of the five Wounds of Our Lord, to ask that not one of those who will die to-day may go to hell.*

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY

ZEAL OF ST VINCENT FOR THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE SALVATION OF SOULS

A CORRELATION necessarily exists between zeal for the Glory of God and zeal for the salvation of souls.

St Augustine asks: "What man should think himself devoured by the zeal of the House of God?" He answers: "He who ardently desires to prevent God being offended, who gets those offences made good, which he could not prevent, and when he cannot get the guilty ones to weep over them, he weeps himself, and sighs to see the Honour of God insulted." If we understand Zeal thus, we shall have to acknowledge that St Vincent possessed it in an eminent degree, under its double aspect. All that we have said hitherto proves that the sole object of his preoccupation was the destruction of sin, and that in all his works he had nothing in view but the Glory of God and the salvation of his neighbour. His zeal was *prudent*, *enlightened*, *indefatigable*, *disinterested*. We shall prove these four points by quoting facts.

First, his zeal was *prudent*, a prudence stamped with calmness and meekness. When obliged to

remonstrate with those under his direction, he did so; but his observations never contained that sort of bitterness which betrays caprice or partiality. His counsels, through an admirable gift of Providence, were those of a man who knows how to fight a present evil, and knows how to foresee what might happen later. On the Missions he thundered against sin, but after having terrified the sinner, he knew how to gain all his confidence. Without flattering the impious he had for him all the tenderness of a mother for her child. Speaking to the great ones of this world, he did not mince the truth; but the truth, which is so often odious, was covered under the cloak of respect, tenderness, and the high idea they always had of his holiness.

His zeal was *enlightened*. The maxims of the Gospel, the authority of the Fathers, the decisions of the most celebrated Doctors, were always his guides. Could anyone have safer ones? In this way, as to morals, he always kept the balance between austerity and relaxation. A great fund of common sense; friendly relations with the most enlightened men of the Faculty of Theology in Paris; care to have recourse to God in his doubts; in a word, all the happy dispositions he owed to Grace and to nature, conducted him always along the thoroughly safe road which is equally removed from both extremes.

His zeal was also *indefatigable*. Think of the energy and constancy which must have been necessary for a man who during long years was labouring to shelter from misery whole Provinces,

with fresh needs ever cropping up! What are we to think of a man who, in helping the poor of several Hospitals, had to surmount difficulties of all kinds? A man who, overwhelmed with infirmity and eighty-four years of age, gave Missions, preached, confessed and gave catechism to little children? A man who, wherever the Glory of God or the salvation of man was concerned, heeded neither obstacles, nor fatigues, nor expense? "Oh, Gentlemen," he wrote, in order to encourage his children to work zealously, "if the Company which is only newly born, has had the courage to undertake so many Missions, so many Conferences, Retreats, Reunions, so many journeys for the poor; to establish so many Seminaries and Associations of Charity; to embrace all these different opportunities of serving God, certainly it will do something more, when, with time, it has gathered a little more strength, provided it is faithful to the Grace of vocation. . . . If the salvation of one soul is of such importance that one must expose one's temporal life to procure it, how could we ever abandon such a great number of them through fear of expense?"

Finally, his zeal was *disinterested.* He never dreamt of crossing the seas, or going through the country to get contributions from the people he visited; very far from that, it was at his own expense he rendered them all the services which depended on himself. On the Missions he would not even accept the stipends for Masses celebrated for the intention of the donor, but caused them to be distributed amongst the sick by the very ones

who had made the offering. A Parish Priest who was comfortably off, offered his own living for the Missioners, but they were not allowed to accept it. "A Missioner," he wrote, "who works on the purse of another is no less guilty than a Capuchin who touches money. I beg of you, once for all, never to give Missions except at the expense of your own House."

St Vincent possessed also another kind of disinterestedness, more difficult and less common. He was absolutely ignorant of that spirit of jealousy amongst fellow-workers against which so many are not sufficiently on their guard; his zeal resembled that of Moses working with Aaron in perfect harmony. Like him, he desired that all should possess the Spirit of God; he watched the success of other Orders with the holy joy of the Children of God; he published it abroad on every occasion; he even rendered them services which they never knew about. To show what they had done he even went so far as to depreciate his own. In his own Congregation he saw only an association of unskilful gleaners, following afar off "the great reapers" of souls and obliged to believe, in order to find grace before God, that their little sheaves of corn could not be pleasing to Him, except in union with the abundant harvest of others.

However, if this truly great man has declared in the words of the Book of Wisdom that he has "done nothing but gather up a few grapes, passed over by the vintagers," yet the Church, in her Office for his Feast, makes him say that, in spite of

everything, he has filled the wine press : " *Et quasi qui vindemiat replevi torcular.*" The reader has been able to convince himself of this so far. The maxims and spirit of the Servant of God have been maintained to this day amongst his Missioners in all their integrity.

These details are surely sufficient to make known how truly St Vincent's zeal was *wise*, *enlightened*, *indefatigable* and *disinterested*.

PRACTICE.—*An alms for the intention of some poor child. If you cannot give this alms, go and hear a Mass, to obtain from the Lord the conversion of so many souls who are dying in miserable ignorance of the Truths of the Gospel.*

TWENTY-NINTH DAY

DISINTERESTEDNESS AND DETACHMENT FROM THE THINGS OF EARTH

A CERTAIN gentleman, having given a sum of four thousand pounds for the Missions, fell into a state of need. St Vincent, having been informed of this, wrote to him that he should take the interest of this gift, adding that he would return the capital itself if the interest were not sufficient. In order to entice him to speak his mind more freely he assured him that, at other times, the same difficulty had been settled in this way.

A few years later he had reason to fear that a benefactor of the Company regretted his liberality, being in business difficulties. "I beg of you," the Saint said to him, "to make use of the revenues of our country house as if they were your own. We are ready to sell all that we have for you, even our chalices; in this we shall only be doing what the Canon Law commands, which is to give back to a Founder when he is in need, whatever he gave us when he was in affluence; and what I say to you, sir, I say before God, and just as I think in the depths of my heart."

A number of ladies of quality having offered the

holy Priest the sum of six hundred thousand francs to build a church, he did not accept it, giving as his reason that the needs of the poor were at that time too great, and that he must busy himself above all in procuring what was necessary for them.

A lawsuit was brought against him which everyone believed to be unjust; nevertheless St Vincent lost it. At the first news of this result he wrote to one of his friends: "Sir, those who are friends tell each other the good and the bad that happens to them, and as you are one of the best friends we have in the world, I am bound to communicate to you the loss we have sustained in the lawsuit about the farm of Orsigny; not, however, as an evil which has happened to us, but as a grace which God has granted us, so that you may be pleased, sir, to help us to thank Him for it. I call the afflictions God sends us, graces, especially those that are well accepted. Now, His Infinite Goodness, having prepared us for this privation before it took place, has also made us acquiesce in this loss with entire resignation, and I venture to say with as much joy as if it had been a gain. This would seem a paradox to anyone not versed in the things of Heaven as you are, sir, and who would not know that conformity to the good pleasure of God in adversities is a greater good than all temporal advantages." (Letter to Desbardas of the Counting Office.)

The news of the adverse decision being spread abroad, many of the most distinguished lawyers came to advise the holy man to lodge an appeal. One of them assured him that the fresh verdict

would infallibly be to his advantage, and he offered himself not only to plead the cause gratuitously, but even to indemnify the House of St Lazare if he should happen to lose the lawsuit a second time.

In spite of these assurances St Vincent would not lodge an appeal. "However sure we may be," he wrote to this friend, "that we are well justified in lodging an appeal, we cannot make up our minds to have recourse to it: first, because the eight lawyers, whom we consulted individually and in council, before the verdict was pronounced which dispossessed us, always assured us that our right was infallible, and nevertheless the court judged otherwise; so true it is that opinions are divided, and that we must not depend on the judgments of men. Second, one of our duties in giving Missions is to settle differences amongst the people; one might fear then that, if the Company were to insist on a fresh contest in the Court of Appeal, which is the refuge of the greatest wranglers, God might deprive us of the grace of securing reconciliations. Third, we should give great scandal, after such a solemn sentence, if we pleaded to have it annulled. We should be blamed for too much attachment to worldly goods, which is the usual reproach brought against ecclesiastics, and thus, making ourselves talked about in the Palace, we should be harming other Communities, as well as causing our friends to be scandalized in us. Fourth, we have reason to hope that, if the world takes away from us some things on the one hand, God will make it up on the other. We have already

experienced this since the court took away from us this land, for God permitted that one of the Councillors in Parliament who judged us, should leave us, when he was dying, almost as much as we lost. In fact, to speak freely to you, I feel great difficulty in going against the Counsel of Our Lord, Who does not wish that those who have undertaken to follow Him should go to law; and if we have already done so it was because I could not in conscience abandon what had been so legitimately acquired, and what belonged to the Community; for I was only the administrator, and I was bound to do my utmost to preserve it. But now that God has discharged me from this obligation by a supreme decision which has rendered our trouble useless I think we should abide by it. . . ."

Without any doubt St Vincent appeared great in all things in the eyes of the most enlightened men, but above all in his detachment from the things of earth. De Tellier says of him: "On account of my being Secretary of State, I was able to have much intercourse with Mr. Vincent. He did more good works in France for Religion and for the Church than anybody I have known, but what I noticed particularly was that at the Council of Conscience, where he was the principal agent, he never sought in any way his own interests, nor those of the Congregation, nor of those ecclesiastical Houses which he had established. He used his influence in favour of those only whom he thought deserving; as for himself, he had crossed himself off the list of those who might hope for some favour."

His nearest relations never received anything from him. He was often begged to do something for his nephews; he always replied that he would rather see them till the ground than provided with livings. Thus it was said, according to the opinion of the world, that he had lost more than he had gained by being at Court.

If he had asked for the House of St Julien for his own use, most certainly he would have obtained it; but he thought only of giving it to those who have possessed it ever since. A whole year of prayers and entreaties could not persuade him to accept the House of St Lazare, and as soon as the ownership was contested he wished to give it up; to prevent him doing so it was necessary to prove to him that he could not in conscience act thus.

An ecclesiastic one day offered him five hundred crowns. St Vincent, although in extreme need, refused them, saying that two thousand poor, who were also being tried by sickness, had much greater need of them than himself.

The royal Procurator of one of the largest towns in the kingdom gave St Vincent a property belonging to himself before entering the Congregation; St Vincent gave it back to his relations, who had regarded this donation with a jealous eye.

The Holy Priest endowed his Congregation with this same detachment. He never wished, and he could not bear a single step to be taken, to procure for him better subjects, or more beautiful establishments. The maxim of letting God do everything, of abandoning oneself to Him without reserve, of

following His Providence without ever anticipating Him, is so often found in his letters that it is evident he never lost sight of it.

He was inspired with the same principles of detachment with regard to the Daughters of Charity. Not only would he have desired that they should not found establishments, but he wished that they should be always disposed to sacrifice those which they possessed! He withdrew them from one place where they had been called, for the sole reason that their presence might cause some disputes.

PRACTICE.—*Let us think how we can diminish our household expenses a little so as to give something to the poor; the necessity of helping so many unhappy people of every age and condition is just as great and pressing in the times in which we are living as in those of St Vincent.*

THIRTIETH DAY

HOLY DEATH OF ST VINCENT

THERE are two things one usually dreads at the hour of death: the sins of one's past life, and the necessity of appearing before the Divine Justice. We often see people who laugh, both at death, and at those who prepare themselves for it by good works. But these same men, when the hour of death comes, at the moment when there is no more pretence, and when things are called by their right name, these same men feel the pangs of remorse for the good they have neglected and the evil they have done. We see then these unfortunate mortals giving way to vain agitations, to paroxysms of fury, and sometimes to despair. For these men, death is the worst of evils.

It is not thus with virtuous souls. As they approach the end of their life one sees ever increasing in them the desire of going to be united to the God Whom they have loved and served. If sometimes, by the permission of God, even virtuous souls are seized with fear and terror at the thought that they must present themselves at His dread tribunal, Our Lord Himself comes to their aid, comforts them, inspires them with courage, confidence and resignation; their death is precious in the Eyes of the

Lord: "*Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus.*"

St Vincent had nothing to fear; on the contrary, he had everything to hope for. He found himself at the end of his days with a life that had been passed in innocence and in the practice of the most sublime virtues. He was at the end of his strength, but he had expended it all in works of charity, in hospitals, in prisons, in preaching, confessing and catechising. He could say what St Peter said to His Divine Master: "Lord, behold we have given up all things, what then shall be our reward?"

Perceiving that the day was approaching, St Vincent spoke of death with humility, and expressed the desire of going soon to see His God. Sometimes he said to his own brethren: "In a few days' time the corpse of this old sinner will be laid under the ground, reduced to dust, and you will trample it under foot." At other times, reflecting on the number of his years, he repeated: "Lord, I am living too long; I am not improving, and my sins are multiplying in proportion as I advance in years."

His whole life was a continual preparation for death; nevertheless in his latter years he prepared himself with still greater fervour for that great journey.

He made Retreats, prayed, and asked for prayers. In each one of his thoughts, words and actions he sought only his soul, God, and Eternity. He was ripe for Heaven.

He fell into an uneasiness which would not permit him to sleep either night or day. Judging this

state to be a forerunner of death, he said in a jesting way: "It is the brother waiting for the sister." Being quite unable to celebrate Holy Mass, he heard one every day and received Holy Communion, and this until the eve of his death. On that day, after having finished his ordinary exercises of piety, he was in such a state of exhaustion that he had to be carried from the Oratory to his room, where he fell into a kind of lethargy which was a foreboding that the supreme moment was close at hand. The doctor, after examining him, declared that there was no longer any remedy or hope. He said good-bye to St Vincent, who, with a smile upon his lips, spoke to him a few words of gratitude, without, however, being able to finish them.

One of the oldest of his priests asked his blessing for himself and for all the members of the Company, present and absent. St Vincent made an effort to raise his head a little and pronounce the words of blessing, but, having pronounced part of them distinctly, his strength failed him, and he said the rest in a whisper. In the evening he received Extreme Unction; and he passed the whole night in a sweet, peaceful and continual application of his mind to God. The Assistants, perceiving he had a certain attraction for these words of the Psalmist, "*Deus in adjutorium meum intende; Domine ad adjuvandum me festina*" ("Oh God, come to my aid; make haste, O Lord, to help me"), frequently repeated the first part of the versicle for him, and he hastened to respond: "*Domine ad adjuvandum me festina.*"

An ecclesiastic begged him to give his blessing for himself and to all the ecclesiastics of the *Conference*, so that none of them might ever stray from the path in which he had directed them. St Vincent, with a sentiment of deep humility, answered: "God, Who has begun the good work, will know how to preserve it." Then, a little later, all full of heavenly thoughts, without a sound being heard, with his usual serenity of expression and the tranquillity of a man who is taking a sweet rest, he slept in the Lord. He died in Paris in the eighty-fourth year of his age, on September 27th, 1660.

As the news of his death spread one heard these words repeated everywhere: "*The Saint is dead.*" The orphans wept for him, and the widows also: all the poor cried out in tears, "*He is dead, our Father, our refuge, our support.*" Priests, prelates, knights, princes and members of Parliament, but above all, the members of his Community were for the time inconsolable. But the sobs of grief gave way to the most consoling thought: in losing a support on this earth they had acquired a protector in Heaven.

Such is the death of the just: loved by God and by man; regretted on earth and glorified in Heaven. The just man dies; that is to say, he quits the fatigues of this earth to go and reign for ever with God and the Saints in Heaven. We must not lose sight of the fact that at the hour of death we reap the fruit of the good we have done during life. He who has done good awaits a happy death, the beginning of eternal Bliss, but woe to him who does

not prepare for it, for "a man shall reap only that which he has sown" ("*Quæ seminaverit homo, haec metet*").

PRACTICE.—*Time is only given us that we may prepare to die well. Let us therefore prepare ourselves to-morrow, or as soon as possible, to make a good Confession and Holy Communion, as if they were to be the last of our life.*

THIRTY-FIRST DAY

PANEGYRIC OF THE SAINT FOR THE DAY OF HIS FEAST

"Dilectus Deo et hominibus."
"He was loved by God and by men."

TO please God and man at the same time seems to be a difficult matter, for to study to please God means exposing oneself to a volley of indignation from worldlings, who understand nothing of the things of God. Nevertheless St Vincent had the double advantage of being loved by God and by men. He Who bestows every Light had showered upon him His most precious gifts. A spotless life, sublime piety, steadfast faith, consummate prudence, heroic patience, victory over the most cruel maladies, undaunted courage amidst the rigours of a holy penance, a humility which was the enemy of all ambition, an admirable facility in pardoning injuries, indefatigable zeal for the salvation of souls which nothing could overthrow or dishearten—here is an outline sketch of St Vincent. Or rather we should add to these qualities his lovable frankness, his ingenuous simplicity, which was always combined in him with the spirit of wisdom, his modesty, accompanied by an air of holy joy, his tender compassion towards the poor,

his incessant and ever watchful solicitude to bring back to all Religious their first fervour, and to the Clergy its former splendour. That is typical of St Vincent: "*Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*"

Being destined to remedy great evils, he lived at a time when heresy and civil wars had enveloped the whole of France in horror and desolation. People had thrown off the yoke of Religion and royal authority was no longer respected. The princes themselves, who should have put a check on the licentiousness of the crowd, gave them the example of rebellion. The Provinces, which were divided into different factions, took up arms one against another. Wherever Calvinism was uppermost, there one saw churches ruined, altars overthrown, Priests in flight or strangled, our most august Mysteries profaned and trodden under foot, the holy Sacrifice of the Altar abolished. . . .

Great was the sorrow of St Vincent on finding that men no longer spoke the truth, and on seeing most of the pastors stagnating in culpable indolence, just as the people were sunk in profound ignorance. St Vincent could not remain an idle spectator of so many evils. No, he determined to expend all the ardour of his soul in rousing the zeal of the pastors, in enlightening the people and in restoring discipline. *Dilectus Deo.*

The first means he employed was Missions. Animated with the Apostolic spirit, he sowed the good seed of the Gospel wherever Providence directed him, under the authority of the pastors. Success crowned his works. He was able to revive

the flame of zeal in the clergy ; and where he could not achieve it he supplemented it by his own efforts, or those of the worthy evangelical workers whom he had gathered round him. To render his ministry all the more fruitful he added thereto all the good offices of Christian charity, as if he were responsible for all the good that was not done, and guilty of all the evil that was committed. One thing struck him especially : it was the sad state in which the country people were living ; how their pastors sometimes left them wallowing in ignorance and disorder. He felt fired with zeal for these poor people, and believed he was sent expressly by God to teach them the Gospel, and he taught them with all the more joy, when he found in them most simple faith and a most submissive mind.

With this end in view, at the price of incredible fatigues, he went the round of the market towns, villages, down to the most distant hamlets and the most inaccessible spots. He penetrated everywhere in search of souls, those souls that are worthless in the eyes of men, but most precious in the eyes of Jesus Christ. He taught them the Mysteries of our holy Religion, the rules of Christian morality, and brought these prodigal children back to their Father's House : "*Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*"

Living in Paris, absorbed by occupations of the highest importance, he never lost sight of his friends, the poor. His tenderness for them seemed to be inborn within him, and became daily more active and more ingenious in discovering and comforting their miseries. There is no work of charity for

which he did not find means of support through his untiring devotion. The old men bent under the weight of years, the orphans, the foundlings, the condemned galley slaves, whole provinces reduced to the most horrible misery by enemies from without, and civil discords from within—they all found in St Vincent a father and a liberator. For some he preserved life, to others he gave freedom; to these a Christian education, to those a helpful Retreat. Through his care magnificent hospitals were built in Paris, to serve as refuges for the unhappy outcasts who were encumbering the streets of that city. No misery could have escaped the charity of this man of God; and that nothing might be wanting in the heroism of these great works, he joined material care of the body with his solicitude for souls: "*Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*"

Hence St Vincent was one of those men of mercy whose works will live for ever in the annals of Holy Church. It was he whom kings, princes, ministers, bishops, magistrates, nobility and people regarded as the saint of their century. He was indeed the Model of pastors, the Father of the outcasts, the Support of bishops, the Counsellor of kings, the Reformer of the clergy, the Defender of the Church, the Soul of all great things that were done during his life for the Glory of God. In spite of the poverty he professed so religiously, in twenty years he distributed incalculable alms. His zeal knew no other limits than the confines of the whole habitable world. Without leaving Paris he put in motion France, Great Britain, Italy and

Poland. After having sufficed for all the needs of the inhabitants in the cold Hebrides, he brought new fire, by his burning zeal, into the hot climates, and strove to sanctify the slave of Algiers and the native of Madagascar. His virtue gathered trophies on the continents ; at a time when the multitude of sinners seemed to threaten religion with total ruin, he knew how to support it, to the confusion of those who made so many efforts against it.

The Houses of his Congregation, which were opened as so many shelters of religion, not only gave it new strength through his priests, but also were the cause of new and steady conquests. Christians who through worldly business, and especially their own passions, had closed their eyes to the glory of their heavenly origin, found here in St Vincent and his spiritual sons, enlightened guides, charitable physicians, who taught them to esteem less the decrepit things of this world and to value those of Heaven at their true worth. Those also who brought with them to these holy Retreats the treasure of a pure heart, and came with the design of reaching the heights of Christian perfection, found in St Vincent an admirable example of every virtue. Such were the fruits of the ten-days' Retreats which St Vincent established in his Houses. Sheltered by solitude and silence and aided by spiritual conferences, prayer and holy readings, devotion was revived and ever increased in vigour : " *Dilectus Deo et* HOMINIBUS ! "

But the principal care of the holy priest was the reform of the clergy, as being the source of faith

and devotion to be transmitted to the people. St Vincent therefore, by command of the Bishops, took the charge of preparing the candidates for the holy Ministry. For this end he spared neither trouble nor fatigue; instructions, prayers, everything was set working to prepare the aspirants to ascend the Altar with the purity of mind and profound reverence due to these holy functions. God deigned to place him in a position in which he could do still more—that is, prepare good Bishops for the Church in France. Being called by the Queen-Mother, Anne of Austria, to the Council of Conscience, he helped greatly to get apostolic men chosen for the highest dignities of the Church; and we may say that the clergy of France are indebted to him for the splendour with which they shone at that time, and for long afterwards.

What shall we say about the Conferences on Holy Scripture, ecclesiastical discipline, and the direction of pastors which St Vincent instituted? What shall we say of the considerable number of Seminaries, for which he provided Houses and revenues, for which he drew up regulations, and bequeathed to them the inestimable treasure of wise Directors? "*Dilectus Deo et hominibus!*"

His charitable solicitude embraced everything; health of body as well as the salvation of souls. One saw him humbling himself to render the lowest services to the poor; and also exhorting the dying with that sweet, insinuating, persuasive eloquence which, being animated by the breath of charity, usually meets with its reward in success even here

below. These establishments, which serve as a refuge for outcasts, are due to the labours of St Vincent and his priests. Later on they were multiplied, thanks to the generosity of the people, the zeal of the ministers of State, and the tender piety of the pastors. In our day they still continue to multiply under the name of "Hospices of Charity."

One can find these charitable establishments in Italy, in France and all through Europe, where an innumerable multitude of poor abandoned people find a refuge for their spiritual and temporal misery. Without mentioning any other towns, Turin alone possesses two Asylums for sick children, a House for foundlings, a Refuge for beggars; many Refuges of charity for adults, either sick or in good health. Finally, in our days it is given us to see the glorious triumph of the gigantic work called "*The Little House of Divine Providence, under the protection of St Vincent de Paul,*" in which human misery under every form finds a refuge and comfort. Such are the fruits of the seed sown by St Vincent de Paul, that great man so dear to God and to men: "*Dilectus Deo et hominibus.*"

In admiring his holy works let us try, my Brothers, to imitate his virtues, and we shall be sure to gain the affection of men. But, what is far more important for us, we shall be cherished by God, Who will know how to recompense richly each one of our good actions, pouring down His blessings on us while on earth, to make us worthy to share one day in the glory which the Blessed, together with

St Vincent de Paul, are now enjoying for ever and ever. *Amen !*

PRACTICE.—*Let us do good whilst there is time, during life ; if in labouring for the Glory of God we meet with fatigues or tribulations, no matter of what kind, let us say with St Paul : " What I suffer is only for a moment ; but the prize, the recompense which God will give me in Heaven, will last for all eternity."*

TO THE GLORIOUS
ST VINCENT DE PAUL

Who was born in France, under the Pontificate of Gregory XIII, destined by his parents to tend flocks, then applied to sacred studies, a bachelor in theology, ordained a priest, became a slave in Barbary, sold to three different masters, (he converted the last one from apostasy to the Christian Faith); and received in Rome some secret and important communications, to deliver to King Henry IV ;

—To the Parish Priest, full of zeal and vigilance, who rebuilt the Church of Clichy without imposing any burden on the parishioners, and provided it with furniture and necessary ornaments ;

—To the Parish Priest of Châtillon-en-Bresse, who laboured to reform the manners of the clergy,

converted heretics, helped the poor, and led back into the way of truth those who had strayed into the paths of error;

—To the Priest, who was twenty-eighth Abbot of Saint Leonards, of Chaume; admitted into the house of Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, General of the galleys of France; Director of Frances Margaret de Silly, a lady of great virtue; enlightened tutor to her three children, of whom one was a duke and peer of France, the second, a Cardinal of Holy Church, and the third died at the age of eleven;

—To St Vincent, royal chaplain of the galleys of Louis XIII, whom he assisted on his death bed; chaplain to his widow, Anne of Austria, counsellor to that Queen concerning ecclesiastical affairs, Founder and first Superior General of the Secular Priests of the Mission, and of the Daughters of Charity, servants of the poor; as also, of several Associations of Ladies; of the nobility and peasantry, and of young girls, for the service of the sick; to him, who first carried the good news of the Gospel, through his priests, to the Island of Madagascar; and, as an indefatigable worker in the vineyard of the Lord, sent his own priests to preach in France, Italy, Poland, Scotland, Ireland, England, Barbary, and the Indies;

—To the Superior full of Zeal for the honour of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, who restored to the clergy of France the lustre of their virtues, re-established ancient discipline, founded and directed Seminaries, opened a school of Sacred Liturgy at St Lazare, in Paris; established the spiritual

Exercises for the Ordinands, and Conferences for the Ecclesiastics, Retreats for all kinds of persons, desiring that the doors of the Houses of his Congregation should be always open ;

—To the Apostle, the ardent enemy of vice and error, who zealously defended the principles of Faith and of Evangelical morality : full of horror for the new growing heresies ; most submissive to the authority of the Church, and of Its Head, the successor of St Peter ; full of respect for Bishops, and most obedient to their orders ;

—To the father of all the poor, to the true friend of the unhappy, for whom, besides numerous secret alms, he expended more than a million and eight hundred thousand pounds in France ; who founded splendid Hospitals on Christian soil and elsewhere ; five in Paris, for the foundlings, the slaves, the working people, the beggars, the insane ; one for the travellers to St Reine, in the diocese of Autun ; one at Marseilles for the slaves ; one in the town of Algiers, for the Christians who were kept in slavery ;

—To the prime mover of so many works, who co-operated in the foundation of various Hostels for young girls ; gave provisions to fifteen thousand poor in Paris, and, during thirty years, provided medicine and food for an immense number of afflicted in France, Savoy, Italy, and other more distant countries ;

—To him who was the refuge and resource of Ecclesiastics, of Religious, of noble ladies, and of gentlemen, who were obliged, through love of their

faith, to leave Scotland, Ireland, England, etc. . . . and whom he provided with a home, maintenance and clothing;

—To St Vincent, who, the father, friend, and consoler of all, distributed a million of money in the Provinces of Champagne and Lorraine, and in the country of Ardennes; twelve thousand crowns to the Maronites of Lebanon; who ransomed more than twelve hundred slaves, at the price of twelve hundred thousand francs; and gave spiritual and temporal food to the Christians living amongst the Turks, at Turin, Algiers, Biserte, and Calès Petriera;

—To the Priest, who restored and furnished what was necessary for worship, in a number of churches that had been upset during the storms of civil war; he was, for the excited or oppressed French people, a peaceful mediator with kings, and restored order, justice, security and peace;

—To the pious man, praised by St Francis de Sales, who knew no one more worthy nor more prudent; who merited the most profound esteem of St Jane de Chantal, and was chosen by these two holy personages, to be the first Superior and Confessor of the Visitation nuns in Paris, whom he assisted with charity, instructed with zeal, and directed with prudence, during forty years;

—To him, who was loved by the Sovereign Pontiffs, esteemed by three Cardinals who were most renowned for their science, and their virtue; venerated by the most illustrious personages, consulted as the oracle of his century, by princes, bishops, parish priests, doctors, religious, and

Abbots or Superiors of Communities; who rendered notable services to all the Religious Orders in France, especially by working at the reform of several abbeys or monasteries of men and women;

To St Vincent de Paul

—Who was ever occupied with the Glory of God, with the salvation of souls, the honour of the Priesthood, the comfort of the poor; who was meek and amiable towards all; a model of simplicity, humility, uprightness; a signal benefactor of Religion, of the Church, the State, of Humanity. Full of virtue, of merits, of sanctity, he died at St Lazare in Paris, in 1660, under the Pontificate of Alexander VII, in the reign of Louis XIV; honoured at his funeral by the presence of the Prince de Gondi, the Duchess of Aiguillon, Monsignor Piccolomini, Archbishop of Cesarea and Papal Nuncio, a great number of prelates, parish priests, ecclesiastics, Abbots, Religious, cavaliers, and noble ladies; Beatified by Benedict XIII in 1729, solemnly Canonized in Rome by Clement XII in 1736, admired everywhere as the Hero of Charity and of Christian Humility; the object of a special Cult on the part of ecclesiastics;

—to St Vincent,

The Author,
In the Name of Those Who Honour Him
and Pray to Him,
Dedicates and Consecrates
This Book

Don Bosco

JL

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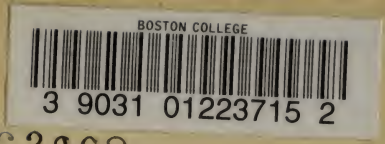

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